

THE
INDIAN ALPS



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THE
INDIAN ALPS
AND
HOW WE CROSSED THEM

BEING A NARRATIVE OF
TWO YEARS' RESIDENCE IN THE EASTERN HIMALAYA
AND TWO MONTHS' TOUR INTO THE INTERIOR



BY
A LADY PIONEER

ILLUSTRATED BY HERSELF

LONDON
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1876

TO
MY MOTHER

These Pages

THE SUBSTANCE OF LETTERS SENT HOME TO HER DURING ALMOST
THE ONLY TIME WE WERE EVER SEPARATED

Are affectionately Inscribed

PREFACE.

THE FOLLOWING PAGES were written principally in India, and sent home at short intervals for the exclusive perusal of a family circle. They make no pretension to a scientific character, the little band of travellers who ventured with me into the interior of the Eastern Himalaya having done so, not for the purpose of scientific research, but simply to explore an almost unknown country, and to enjoy the incidents of travel. Neither do they pretend to give any adequate conception of the magnificence of the scenery of that vast mountain region, for in truth its beauty and grandeur are alike beyond all power of description.

For the defects of this volume I may perhaps be

allowed to plead the difficulties of a task which can never be more than imperfectly achieved ; while, in asking an indulgent judgment of the drawings from which the chromolithographs and woodcuts have been executed, I may mention that they were painted, in almost every instance, with frozen fingers, the smaller sketches being often scratched hastily on letter paper, as I sat sometimes on a portmanteau and sometimes on a tent-peg. In laying them before the public I have yielded to the earnest solicitation of my friends. If the perusal of these pages should prove a source of gratification to others, who, by following on paper my footsteps over untrodden paths, may be able in ever so faint a degree to realise something of the glory and sublimity of that highly favoured land, I shall not regret that I overcame the diffidence I felt in giving publication to the book.

In indicating our route into the 'interior' by a red line on the map, I have given the general bearings only of our journey. Had we taken 'observations' at the end of each day's march, our route would have presented a zig-zag appearance, as the configuration of the mountains we had to cross sometimes obliged us to

travel in a north-westerly and sometimes in a north-easterly direction. As no such 'observations' were taken, I have indicated the route in the simplest manner possible—viz. by a comparatively straight line. In computing the distance of our tour by the scale on the map, I may also mention that the elevations and depressions necessarily incident to mountain-travelling should be taken into consideration, none of which could be indicated on the flat surface of a map.

CLEVELDON *December 16, 1875*

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Errata

Page 91, headline, for *THE BHOOTIA BUSH* read *THE BHOOTIA BUSTI*

103, line 4, for direct hatred, read dire hatred

THE INDIAN ALPS

AND

HOW WE CROSSED THEM

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

There is a spot of earth, supremely blest,
A dearer sweeter spot than all the rest,—MONTGOMERY.

O SCARLET poppies in the rich ripe corn! O sunny uplands striped with golden sheaves! O darkling heather on the distant hills, stretching away, away to the far-off sea, where little boats with white sails, vague and indistinct in the misty horizon, lie floating dreamily!

How exquisitely the soft neutral grey of the soil contrasts with that bit of bright sandy beach, and the crimson clover with the canary colour of the sunlit meadows! One's sense of harmony is never ruffled or disturbed by the colours on earth's broad palette. The sky, flecked with fleecy clouds, is soft and blue.

Lights and shadows, ever shifting, play athwart the quivering fern-brake, just showing the first warm tinge of autumnal splendour. All nature inanimate is immersed in the semi-slumber of noontide. Now and then a buttercup nods its head as though it were napping, and on a harebell stalk a butterfly poises itself, with a gentle see-saw motion, as if rocking itself to sleep. Nothing seems really awake but the bees, still buzzing about the wild flowers; but even they are gathering no honey, as far as I can see, and are only pretending to be busy. The very rooks have ceased to whirl round those old elms yonder, and, congregated on the church tower, which seems to keep guard over the quiet dead in the churchyard beneath, are far too drowsy to enter into animated conversation. Occasionally an argumentative bird sustains a prolonged caw, but finding no one in the humour to contradict him, he soon subsides into the general stillness.

But see! the upland there to westward, bathed in a flood of ambient light an instant ago, is immersed in sombre shade, as a cloud floats lazily between it and the sun; and, hidden before, now bursts into view, as if by magic, a thatched cottage, the one salient point of the whole landscape. Within the doorway the movements of the cotter's wife may be seen, at some occupation, and a little picture of rural contentment and quietude has been created in a moment. She comes out, and a charming woman she proves to be—charming, that is to say, in an

artistic sense—something orange about her neck, and wearing a madder-coloured gown, whilst a small red-and-white child toddles after her. She has evidently come out to feed the pigs, by the clamour they make at her approach, and there is no need to ask the hour, or note that the sun is at its meridian; for, entering by the wicket, comes the goodman home for his mid-day meal, and from the steeple, surmounted by its weathercock, which gently swings from side to side, the clock strikes twelve, its cracked bell the one bit of discord the ear needed to make the harmony complete.

Why at this instant does the bright blue ribbon round the neck of my little Skye terrier sitting beside me look out of 'keeping'? Why does his sharp civilised yap-yap grate on my ear, as he gazes beseechingly in my face for a token of permission to be off to worry 'the pigs'? Why would a female rustic in ragged attire, sitting on a sunny bank, be more in harmony with nature than one wearing the 'last sweet thing' in hats, its feather just at the particular pose of the year eighteen hundred and seventy—no matter what? Is there no affinity between Mother Nature and the wearers of purple and fine linen? Must we be sons and daughters of the soil to render us one kin? There is poetry in that ragged time-worn thatch, with its tufts of weed and moss growing out of every available cranny; there is poetry in the cotter's wife and her little red-and-white child; there is poetry even in those squeaking and

excited pigs, quarrelling greedily over their 'wash.' Then why not in me and my Skye? In what consists the picturesque?

Such questions as these I used to ask in the golden days of childhood, and on one occasion received a severe snubbing from my governess, who, shaking her head ominously, predicted I should grow up to be a visionary creature not fit for this world, bidding me the rather be practical and get on with my geography. For in those days of my non-age nature was ever a delight to me, and I could draw a landscape pretty accurately, the trees it may be too much like Dutch toys, and the perspective somewhat startling; for has not one of those brilliant productions been preserved by loving hands through all the vicissitude of the chequered past, wherein I am represented in conventional pinafore standing at a window listening to the warbling of a sentimental bullfinch as big as myself? But the 'three r's' were an abomination unto me, and geography the very bane of my existence. How little I thought then—ah me! how little any of us think in that Paradise of childhood, when our future lives are to be 'so happy,' where the paths are to be hedged with thornless roses and the flowers to be all 'everlastings,' none to be gathered by the reaper Death—how little I thought, I repeat, in those days whilst she endeavoured to impress upon my unlistening ear the position of the Himalayan mountains, that in after years I should climb their heights and be

able, as now, to recall to mind visions of fairer scenes and fairer skies than even that on which my eye is resting, and behold such grand things in God's beautiful earth, of which man in his philosophy never dreamt.

But are there scenes more fair than those in our own dear land? Well, perhaps not fairer, for nature is sweet in her homely English garb. I love these scented meadows in the glorious summer time; I love these rounded hills and sloping pasture-lands, telling of centuries of peace and plenty; but there are scenes which to look upon make man humbler, and, I think, the better; and even as I sit here quietly drinking in all this placid, tranquil beauty, I am seized with a spirit of unrest, and long to be far away and once more in their midst. Would you see Nature in all her savage grandeur? Then follow me to her wildest solitudes—the home of the yâk, and the wild deer, the land of the citron, and the orange, the arctic lichen, and the pine—where, in deep Alpine valley, rivers cradled in gigantic precipices, and fed by icy peaks, either thunder over tempest-shattered rock, or sleep to the music of their own lullaby—even to the far East, amongst the Indian Alps.

Kennst Du das Land wo die Citronen bluhn,
Im dunkeln Laub die gold Orangen gluhn,
Ein sanfter Wind vom blauen Himmel weht,
Die Myrte still, und hoch der Lorbeer steht,
Kennst Du es wohl?

Dahin ! Dahin !

Mocht ich mit Dir, O mein Geliebter, ziehn.

GOETHE.

It has been said that nothing can be more grand and majestic than the Alps of Switzerland, and that, size is a phantom of the brain, an optical illusion, grandeur consisting rather in form than size. As a rule it may be so ; but they are ' minute philosophers ' who sometimes argue thus. Not that I would disparage the Swiss Alps, which were my first loves, and which, it must be acknowledged, do possess more of *picturesque* beauty than the greater, vaster mountains of the East ; but the stupendous Himalaya—in their great loneliness and vast magnificence, impossible alike to pen and pencil adequately to pourtray, their height, and depth, and length, and breadth of snow appealing to the emotions—impress' one as nothing else can, and seem to expand one's very soul.

We were sitting at dinner one evening beneath a punkah in one of the cities of the plains of India, feeling languid and flabby and miserable, the thermometer standing at anything you like to mention, when the ' khansamah ' (butler) presented F—— with a letter, the envelope of which bore the words, ' On Her Majesty's Service ; ' and on opening it he found himself under orders for two years' service at Darjeeling, one of the lovely settlements in the Himalaya, the ' Abode of Snow '—*Him*, in Sanscrit, signifying ' Snow,' and *alaya* ' Abode '—the *Imaus* of the ancients.

Were the ' Powers that be ' ever so transcendently gracious ? Imagine, if you can, what such an announce-

ment conveyed to our minds. Emancipation from the depleting influences of heat almost unbearable, for the bracing and life-giving breezes which blow over regions of eternal ice and snow.

But even in these days it is wonderful to what an extent ignorance prevails about the more unfrequented parts of India; for it is not generally known, except as a mere abstract truth, that in this vast continent—associated as it is in the purely English mind with scorching heat and arid plains, stretching from horizon to horizon, relieved by naught save belts of palm-girt jungle, the habitat of the elephant, the tiger, and the deadly snake—every variety of climate may be found, from the sultry heat and miasma of the tropical valley, to the temperature of the Poles.

Is not India, indeed, almost exclusively regarded as a land of songless birds arrayed in brightest plumage; of gorgeous butterflies and 'atlas' moths; of cacao-nuts, and dates, and pines more luscious than anything of which the classic Pomona could boast?—a land also where snakes sit corkscrew-like at the foot of one's bed, and wild beasts take shelter in one's 'bungalow'; and where her Majesty's liege subjects, whose fate it is to be exiled there, are exposed to the alternate processes of roasting under a tropical sun, and melting beneath a punkah?

To the feminine mind, again, is it not a land of Cashmere shawls—'such loves'—and fans, and sandal-wood boxes, and diaphanous muslins?—presents sent

over at too infrequent intervals from uncles and cousins, about whom, vegetating in that far-off land, there is always a halo of pleasant mystery, and arriving, redolent of 'cuscus' and spicy odours and a whole bouquet of Indian fragrance, which wafts one away in spirit across the desert and the sunlit ocean to that wonderland in an instant.

A region there is, however, of countless bright oases in these vast plains, where the cuckoo's plaintive note recalls sweet memories of our island home, and mingles with the soft melody of other birds; where the stately oak — monarch of our English woods — spreading its branches, blends them with those of the chestnut, the walnut, and the birch; where in mossy slopes the 'nodding violet blows,' and wild strawberries deck the green bank's side, like rubies set in emerald. I allude of course to the noble snow-capped Himalaya, the loftiest mountains in the world, with whose *existence* everyone is acquainted, but about which brains even saturated with geographical knowledge are yet as ignorant, so far as their topographical aspect and wondrous hidden beauty are concerned, as they are about the mountains in the moon.

Along this chain, at elevations where the temperature is similar to that of England, numerous sanatoria lie nestling, enfolded in their mighty undulations, and dwarfed by the vastness of the surrounding peaks into little toy-like settlements. These are convalescent

depôts for our British soldiers, and refuges for Indian society generally; for all who are able migrate from the plains to these cool regions during the fierce heat of summer, to reinvigorate themselves in the delicious climate.

The most beautiful of all these sanatoria, as far as scenery is concerned, though by no means the largest, is Darjeeling, or the 'Holy Spot'—the Sceptre of the Priesthood—as its name signifies in the Thibetan language; and to this fair Eden—oh, joy!—we are to proceed without delay.



CHAPTER II.

AWAY TO THE HIGHLANDS !

AND so it came to pass one stifling evening, the sun setting a disc of fire, that two figures might be seen, not descending a hill on 'white palfries,' but stepping into a prosaic 'dinghy,' to be ferried across the Hooghly, a branch of the Ganges—a muddy river truly, but all a-glow now with the sun's crimson dye, which has kindled the dome of Government House and the many cupolas and spires of the fair City of Palaces almost into a blaze.

Away down the river noble ships ride at anchor, waiting for the morrow's tide to bear them over its treacherous and ever-shifting sandbanks to the distant sea. Looking towards the city, forests of stately masts from every port under heaven tower skywards, and along the Strand a dense throng of carriages may be seen moving slowly, as the denizens of the proud metropolis, released from their closed houses—from which every particle of the outer atmosphere has been excluded throughout the livelong day—take their '*hawā*

khanā, which, literally translated, means 'eat the air.' From the beautiful 'Eden Gardens' the sound of the band, borne on the sultry breeze, comes wafted towards us; while at the many 'ghauts' numerous figures are seen standing on the steps or in the sacred waters, salaaming to the Day-god as he sinks to rest. Bathing is a religious ceremony with these children of the East—a process said to wash away sin; but, as a rule, they economise time by cleansing their linen and their consciences together, and may generally be seen alternately salaaming and scrubbing away at their 'chuddahs' as they stand waist-deep in the mystic flood.

Noisily settling themselves to roost in the tall poplar trees that fringe its margin, are enormous bald-headed adjutants; whilst others still linger about the steps, balancing themselves on one leg, their long pouches dangling in the air, as they gravely watch the proceedings of the bathers. Loathsome vultures flutter uneasily 'neath the palm fronds, uttering every now and then a shrill moan, as though possessed with the unquiet spirit of the Hindoo which but a day or two ago tenanted the body they have just left, stranded somewhere down the river's banks. From the jungle a mile or two away comes the wild jackal's cry, answered by another herd more distant still, as they call each other to some unholy feast. The Mahomedans bury their dead, but there was a time, not so long ago either, when the bodies of the 'mild Hindoo,' except those of high caste, were

invariably thrown into the river ; but cremation of some sort is now, I believe, the custom amongst Hindoos, if not actually enforced by law, although frequent evasions of it still exist.

In the days I speak of, the statement that the living were left on the banks to die or be washed away by the tide was no Eastern fable, for I have myself often seen the sick carried along on 'charpoys' (bedsteads) in the direction of the sacred river, moving as they went.

But let us quit such painful scenes. Already merrily gleam the thousand lamps which surround the white palaces of the King of Oude's zananas, like a necklace of diamonds, casting their reflection in the water. In little inlets—arms of the river—all amongst the dark trees, fires are burning, indicating the existence of boats moored there, in which swarthy boatmen are cooking their evening meal. Here and there a tiny light may be seen floating down the river ; and you may be sure, though you cannot see them in the gathering darkness, that rustic hours—whose beehive dwellings are hidden in the thick jungle—are standing or kneeling on the slimy brink, watching with eager prayerful eyes the fortunes of the little bark ; for these superstitious people seek therefrom the foreknowledge of events. If it float on out of sight still burning, well is it for the object of their wishes ; but should it go out—by no means unfrequently the case—the contrary is augured. These lights, floating star-like on the dark waters, and seen from the suburban

bridges at all hours of the night, are to my mind the one poetical feature of this eastern city.

Ferried across to the measure of our boatmen's 'barcarolle,' we reach the opposite shore just as the steam-ferry draws up to the pier; and there is no time to lose, for the express is waiting its arrival.

'Can't get in there, sir; that is reserved accommodation for ladies,' shouts the station-master from the other end of the platform, on F——'s following me into the luxurious first-class carriage, fitted with berths for night travelling. As there happens to be no other lady passenger, however, he is permitted to remain; and to prevent molestation at either of the subsequent stations, he at once lies down, and covering himself with shawls and other articles of feminine attire, hopes thus to elude detection.

Leaving all signs of the great metropolis behind, we are soon whirling through rural Bengal: and what a deadly looking swamp it is! Through rice fields, stretching away into the distant horizon; by morass, and fen, and sedgy pool, till the whole country seems under water; by clumps of waving palm trees, standing out black against the afterglow like funereal plumes; till evening at length gives place to night, and all colour fades save in the West, where a narrow blood-red streak, like the reflection from a hundred monster furnaces, still lingers in the heavens, and we reach Serampore.

The official looks in, apparently regarding the lanky figure opposite me with some suspicion. He is no doubt

up to these little subterfuges, but he passes by notwithstanding ; and I have just made up my mind that we are to be left undisturbed, when he returns, and this time stands upon the step and looks in.

‘ Is that a lady opposite you ? ’ he enquires.

‘ A lady ? Well, no ; not exactly ! The fact is, it is my husband,’ I am obliged to confess at last, as F——, moving slightly, lets the shawl slip with which I had endeavoured to conceal him, thereby betraying an unmistakably masculine boot.

‘ Then you must come out of this carriage, sir.’

‘ I can’t,’ replies F——, with some degree of truth ; ‘ my wife’s an invalid, and I cannot leave her.’

‘ Can’t help that, sir,’ rejoins the uncompromising station-master. ‘ There’s a carriage here, where you can both travel together ’ (holding the door of one of the general first-class carriages open).

At this juncture, having heard the altercation, the guard appeared, and, master of the situation, addressing F—— with a significant look, said : ‘ Come into this carriage, sir ; ’ and aside, ‘ I’ll make it all right at the next station.’

Upon which F—— retired for the present, soon to return in triumph for the remainder of the night, when he subsided into sound sleep till peep of day, by which time we reached Sahibgunge, and our railway journey was completed.

Here we were told by an oleaginous native func-

tionary, who gave us the information as though it were a matter of no consequence whatever—which nothing ever seems to be to these phlegmatic people—that all our baggage had been left behind, adding that a luggage train left an hour or two after the express, by which he thought it *likely* they might forward it, in which case we should get it in the course of the day. At this announcement F—— growled out something that I did not catch; perhaps it was a benediction, perhaps it was not. At any rate, it was already too hot to think of getting into a passion; for, early as it was, the sun had sent upwards his avant-guard of crimson cloud, bearing, as on ensign armorial, all the blazonry of his pomp and splendour, and a curtain, like cloth of gold, suddenly spread itself over the Eastern sky, as it does only in these latitudes.

Now this non-arrival of our effects would have obliged us to stay at Sahibganj all the next day—one of the most execrable places in the Mofussil of India—had we not brought a trustworthy servant with us, the steamer by which we were to cross to Caragola leaving hours before the baggage-train would be due. But we are able to depart, fortunately, committing our belongings to his charge, and leaving him to wait their arrival, and follow with them the next day.

The sacred river from this point looks like a broad lake, with low sand-banks here and there, like little flat islands, just peeping above the water. Reaching the

steamer, we find that, being the only passengers, we are to have it all to ourselves; and at ten o'clock, casting off her moorings, we are afloat for the first time upon the sacred Ganges.

Sitting under the awning we watch the various boats float by: some like immense hay-stacks rowed



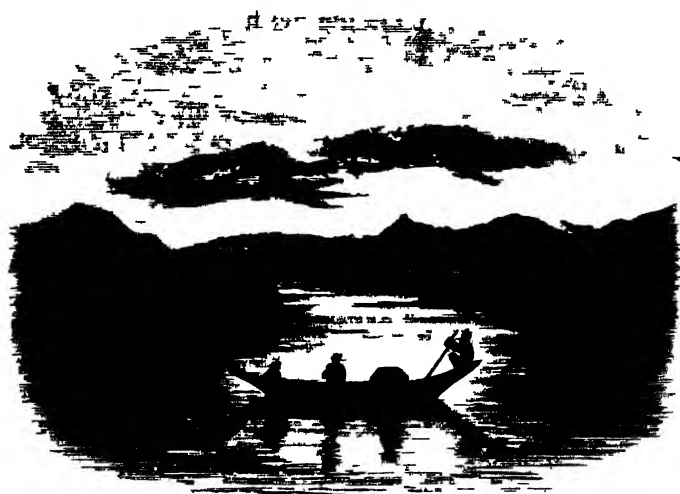
by twenty men; others with clumsy square sails, and thatched huts on their decks, containing merchandise from Nepaul; whilst light little dinghies, with sails set to the wind, bob up and down as they get into the swell of the steamer, and seem to be curtsying to us as they pass.

Then leaning over the steamer's side, in fancy I travel onwards far far away along the course of this

mighty stream, even to its birthplace in eternal snow, whence, issuing beneath a low arch among the glaciers, it is first seen trickling over its narrow bed, worn deep in solid granite, at so great an elevation that the more ignorant of its worshippers believe it descends from paradise itself. Amongst a people of so lively an imagination and extravagant sentiment, endowing as they do so many things inanimate with form and life, it is no wonder that they should have idealised that which brings with it, as from the very heavens, not only fertilisation to these parching plains, but so many other blessings. Accordingly there is a whole world of fables believed in by Hindoos concerning this holiest of rivers, with which the most ancient of all classic lore is connected, and they worship it under the imagery of a goddess whom they call Gunga, the daughter of Himavat; the sublime and lofty solitudes of the Himalaya, like Mount Olympus to the Greeks, being the very home and centre of their mythology. The Hindoos were in a high state of civilisation when Europe was still lying in deepest slumber; for it must be remembered that Hindustan was the cradle of the arts and sciences, and these people—'Niggers,' as I have often heard them contemptuously called—were in possession of both, when even the Greeks lay in obscurity, and the Britons, too oft their despisers, were—humiliating thought—barbarians!

When the sun gets vertical, the captain kindly places

his cabin at my disposal—the only one in the steamer—where, weary of my night's travelling, I remain till it begins to set behind the crimson horizon. And what a sunset! turning the fleet of little boats moored along its banks—for we are gradually nearing Caragola—into jewelled caskets. Far out in the stream a boat is cross-



ing the sunlight, looking black and weird, with a man sitting at its prow, who, for aught that he looked like, might have been Charon himself, ferrying the spirits of the departed over Styx.

Dinner is provided on board, after which we again go on deck, and see the moon rise, a full round orb, bridging the river by a band of tremulous silver light. Southwards the bold outline of the Rajmahals is seen,

quite respectable hills, which by courtesy one might almost call mountains, after living long in the plains. They cast a reflection deep and sombre on the broad expanse of water, in the shadow of which a ship is anchored—a mere toy it looks from this distance, its solitary light burning pale and cold. A flight of wild ducks skims past us, and over the still waters comes softly a boatman's song, 'La—illa—illa—la,' rising and falling in musical but pathetic cadence.

CHAPTER III.

'THE GOVERNMENT BULLOCK TRAIN.'

AND now, how can I describe the old-world style of locomotion, still existing in the nineteenth century, on the 'Grand Trunk Road' in this magnificent Dependency, 'the brightest jewel,' &c. &c., for we have reached a shore where the shriek of the locomotive is never heard.

Having left the steamer on our arrival at Caragola, and crawling up the steep incline knee-deep in sand, we find a 'hackery' awaiting us, covered by a rough tilt—a sort of gipsy arrangement—to which are yoked two small bullocks, the whole thing of a kind which you feel sure must have been in use in the time of the Pharaohs, the wheels of almost solid wood rolling round with a reluctance and squeak that is positively maddening. This goes, laughable as it may seem, by the dignified and euphonious appellation of the 'Government Bullock Train.'

All is ready for departure, for they had seen the steamer, a little black speck in the horizon, two hours ago. We mount our chariot therefore and start at the magnificent pace of a mile and a half an hour. The rules are, I believe, that they shall not be required to go faster

than *three miles* an hour; but as they never by any chance arrive at this alarming speed, the prohibition is scarcely necessary.

A lantern suspended from the tilt sways to and fro, the tassel of F——'s smoking-cap, doing likewise, keeps time with it; the body of the driver, sitting astride the pole to which the bullocks are attached, sways backwards and forwards too, with the regularity of a piece of mechanism, as he pokes and pushes first this bullock and then that, varied only, alas! by screwing their tails round and round in his endeavours to get them on. Besides this, the goad, a short stout stick, is often called into requisition, answering the double purpose of poking and striking, the latter accomplished in successive thuds on their poor lean backs, and accompanied by an amount of jabbering persuasion inconceivable to anyone who has not travelled under the Jehuship of an Asiatic, the former making one's very heart sick, and the latter beyond everything annoying to the ear. But nothing makes the slightest impression upon them. By all these combined efforts they are simply kept in motion, and I soon grow stoical in the matter, and learn to believe that without them they would not move at all.

After a while, however, just when we are sinking into a state of somnolence, induced by the monotony of the whole performance, we hear the stick administered with more than ordinary energy, and they do make an effort for once, and succeed in getting into a trot; but it

is only to take us clean off the road and land us upside-down in the 'paddy' (rice) field seven feet below.

But this does not appear to excite the smallest surprise in our Jehu, who seems to take it all as a matter of course; and after we have managed to scramble out—hardly knowing which is our head or which our heels, not hurt, but severely shaken—he gives them one deprecatory glance, and proceeds leisurely to unfasten the yoke.

The bullocks, once loose, begin quietly grazing as if nothing had happened, whilst we sit down on the bank and bear it as philosophically as we can, till our triumphal car is righted and again put in motion, when, in process of time, we reach the first 'chokee' (or stage), and have to change our noble beasts.

This is a sleepy little village, surrounded by 'paddy' fields, a light here and there glimmering feebly through the doors of the mud huts. The driver shouts, to arouse the amiable native who has to furnish us with the expected relay, 'Jaf-fa!' repeated several times, but no answer; 'Ho! Jaf-fa-a-a-a!' descending the gamut in an injured tone. At length a light is seen slowly approaching from a distant hut—they never hurry themselves, these *Oriental*s, under the most pressing circumstances—and the bearer of it gives us the consoling information that there is no relay of bullocks, a 'bobbery (quarrelsome) sahib' having taken those we were to have had for his own 'dāk' about an hour ago, his beasts having broken down by the way.

At this declaration, the driver makes use of choice Hindustani expletives, and pronounces it to be a 'jhūt' (lie); but on his maintaining the assertion, what can we do but 'bless the bobbery sahib,' which I am afraid F—— does in language no less complimentary, and offer 'backsheesh' to our informant if he will only obtain other bullocks speedily elsewhere.

Stimulated by this magic word, he retires with more precipitation than is their wont, and we watch his light growing fainter and fainter as he crosses the paddy-field. No matter how bright may shine the moon, natives are never seen without carrying a lantern at night, which they say frightens away 'cobras,' a snake whose bite is death; and presently we hear his voice growing more and more distant, as he calls his kine, straying in the jungle far away; whilst we are compelled to wait two weary, dreary, miserable hours, before we can once more proceed on our way.

This, then, is the 'Government Bullock Train'—what an imposing title!—for which, together with the transit of our luggage by a similar conveyance, F——, with becoming gravity, paid 75 rupees (7*l.* 10*s.*) to the Post-office authorities a few days before starting, the name in itself being a guarantee of its respectability, suggesting to the mind of the uninitiated, if it suggested anything in particular, a train freighted with bullocks! At any rate the word *train* at once conveyed the idea of speed, and for this reason it has no doubt been ironically

given; but we hope the Indian Government will be more sedate in its nomenclature for the future, and give up jesting, which is improper and undignified in the Great.

In like fashion creeping along the road, the monotony relieved by similar incidents, the first faint streak of dawn appears, and in the cold grey half-light we overtake long lines of 'hackeries' of a more primitive kind than that even in which we are journeying, each wheel, as it revolves, producing its own particular and peculiar squeak—for they never grease them, to do so would cause the drivers to lose their caste—all looking as if they had come straight out of the land of Canaan, and were going down into Egypt to buy oil, and corn, and wine; and, following in their wake, we fancy *we* must be going down into Egypt too, with our money in our sack's mouth.

Past miles and miles of dusty pepul trees, growing on each side of the road, the soft blue distance seen through them, bathed in silvery mist, and there is a dewy freshness in the air. Past strings of pilgrims, walking wearily along to or from some shrine, probably Parisnāth, a mountain of unusual sanctity across the Ganges, the centre of Jain worship. On, till we meet commissariat waggons, drawn by immense bullocks, beautiful creatures with large meek eyes like gazelles, soft dove-colour skins, and large humps on their backs, which, being hungry, we feel inclined to eat, there being nothing carnose half so delicious as these humps when salted. Past little villages, scarcely awake yet, and more hackeries, the poor

beasts, moving their heads from side to side, as they strive to make the hard yoke easier to their necks. Ah! well, indeed, has Scripture used it as a symbol of a burden grievous to be borne.

At length a great clatter is heard in the distance, and something is seen hovering above the road, bearing down upon us like an enormous vulture, which turns out to be nothing more or less than Her Majesty's mail, sending up clouds of dust, and hiding everything but the driver and an unhappy traveller clinging on by his eyelids to the back seat.



CHAPTER IV.

WE REACH OUR FIRST STAGING BUNGALOW, AND PARTAKE
OF 'SUDDEN DEATH.'

IT was broad day by the time we reached Purneah, and came to anchor in the little 'bungalow' which answers to a roadside inn. We caught sight of the kitmutgar, or table attendant, some little time ago, performing his simple toilet in the verandah, as he heard the familiar squeak of our chariot wheels, and knew that some '*sahib logue*' must be approaching. We have scarcely alighted when he presents himself, and with a low salaam begs to be informed what we wish for breakfast, which is followed by the very natural question from the '*sahib logue*' of 'What can you give us?'—the rejoinder, nine times out of ten in these places, where travellers are comparatively few and far between, being, '*Moor-gher grill, sahib, aur chupattee* (grilled fowl and chupattee):' the former, a dish known in India, in the language of modern ethics, as 'sudden death,' from the fact of the unfortunate little feathered biped being captured, killed, skinned, grilled, and on the table in the space of twenty minutes; and the latter an odious leathery, and indigestible

compound, apparently made of equal proportions of sand and flour, and eaten as a substitute for bread.

Now follows the chase for the irrepressible 'moorghee,' which is always at hand, pecking and strutting about amongst its kind in the 'compound,' or inclosure of the bungalow; sometimes making migratory raids and explorations into the hackery in search of crumbs, or any other small delicacies that may happen to be found within it, till the *bāwārchī* (cook) is seen emerging from the cook-house across the yard, at the sight of whom, even before he is in pursuit, the whole brood are in violent commotion, their instinct—or 'hereditary experience,' handed down to them by a long line of suffering ancestors, likewise sacrificed to 'grill'—warning them what is to come. The greater number, however, manage to elude the inevitable for a while, by making their escape; but one or two of nervous temperament get too frightened to follow the rest in their flight, and, losing their heads entirely, make a dash into the bungalow itself, then under the table, and, hunted down for a few minutes longer, are usually run to earth at last beneath one's very chair. Then succeeds the poor little captive's last speech and confession, whilst the kitmutgar is hastily laying the cloth, and one can hear it frizzling over the fire in a twinkling. Should the traveller require a second or third course, as he generally does, moorghee cutlets or moorghee currie await him; and other victims have to be sacrificed, accompanied by the usual preliminaries.

Here, however, we find ourselves in clover, and in the lap of luxury itself, for Purneah being a station of some importance, it possesses a bazaar, and the kitmutgar informs us that, in addition to 'moorghee grill,' we can have 'mutton chop grid-iron-fry,' whatever that may be—a dish hitherto unknown to us in our experience of the deep mysteries of the Indian cuisine.

These staging bungalows usually contain four rooms, each opening pleasantly upon a verandah; the furniture, however, is of the most wretched description, consisting merely of a table, a punkah, and a few uncomfortable chairs, in which, after your long journey, you sit ill at ease, wishing you possessed the buckram vertebræ of your ancestors, whilst the matting covering the floors is too frequently in holes. Musing as you sit bolt upright, you will probably be attracted by the least possible noise, and, on looking in the direction of the sound, may see a pair of antennæ or tiny legs, with a small head peeping above the matting where it skirts the walls. It may be that of a centipede or little black scorpion, or, if the time be evening, a fleshy-brown cockroach. They are as a rule, however, very clean, being under the superintendence of the Public Works Department—not the cockroaches, but the bungalows—and are unquestionably a great convenience to travellers up the country.

Weary of our long night in the 'Government Bullock Train'—I wish with all my heart the members of the 'Supreme Government' were obliged to travel in it for

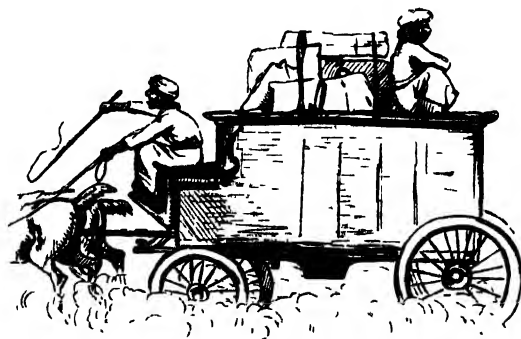
fifteen consecutive hours!—we hire a 'palkee gharee' to take us on to the next station, Sileegoree, deciding to halt where we are during the day, and to proceed on our journey in the cool of the evening. Accordingly at 6 P.M. an oblong deadly looking machine, resembling a hearse, makes its appearance, drawn by two horses, the pace whereof is guaranteed to be ten miles an hour, when once they have been persuaded to make a start!

To our inexpressible relief our servant arrived some hours ago, bringing with him our long-lost luggage, and whilst it is being packed on the top, the horses are taken out, something being amiss with the harness. One of them is a sturdy little animal, the other a tall bony creature, with a neck like a giraffe, of the genus *Bucephalus Alexandrinus*, with a great deal of 'spirit' in him, judging from his proud exterior, and the way he carries his head; but we soon find, alas! that this quality resides in his outward bearing only. During the process of harnessing, which proceeds with no small difficulty, requested by the coachman to take our places, we get in, and lie down side by side at full length, that being the appropriate mode of conveyance.

Six men seize the wheels, crack goes the whip, 'Whr-r-r-r-r!' shouts the coachman, simultaneously; *Bucephalus* assumes a war-like attitude, raises his head haughtily, and paws the air. The smaller animal pulls conscientiously, but still we do not move. The coachman performs a feat, not only of arms but legs, throwing

both over his head in utter desperation. Another crack of the whip, and Bucephalus this time backs determinedly, threatening to overturn us into a dirty pond hard by.

Chorus of men still at the wheels, 'La-la-hi-hi-iddl-iddl-iddl-whish-sh-sh!' The last syllable prolonged and hissed through the teeth. Truly the mouths of these Bengalees seem made especially for the utterance of infinitesimal monosyllables. But they prevail at last, and we are *en route*. The coachman, or chief undertaker, seizing his bugle, plays a pathetic, 'Too-too-too,' and we go on now at an ever-increasing pace, whilst the vehicle sways from side to side ominously, and we realise in an instant the meaning of the hearse, and feel we are being borne along to a speedy and untimely grave, and so on, and so on, till—as Mr. Pecksniff remarked to his charming daughters, on their way to London—'It is to-morrow, and we are there.'



CHAPTER V.

WE MAKE OUR TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO PUNKAHBAREE.

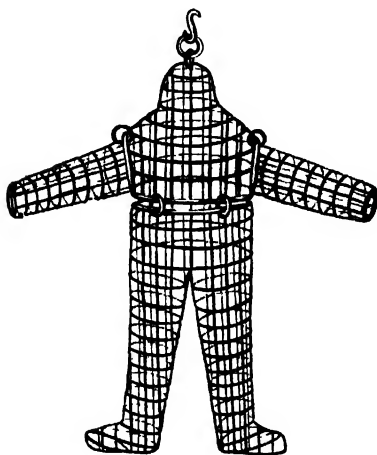
BUT although it is 'to morrow,' for it is long past midnight, and we are 'there,' that does not mean Darjeeling, but Kishengunge ; and a dismal and ugly place it truly is at this time of night.

Kishengunge, through which the road passes, is a thickly populated village, noted at one time for dacoits ; and even now it not unfrequently happens that travellers, on their way to or from the Hills, are molested by these daring highway robbers. Not very long ago a British officer journeying to — was beset by a band of them, and robbed of every stitch of luggage he possessed. Now it happened that, according to the custom of Indian travellers on these long night journeys, he had disencumbered himself of all superfluous attire, and donning his dressing-gown and night-cap, under a happy consciousness of absolute security, he laid him down comfortably, as he thought, till morning. But behold the gallant officer as he appeared on arrival at his destination !



Moral : when travelling by *dāk gharee* in India, be not over-confident, but go to sleep in complete armour, ready for any emergency.

Shortly after the commencement of his Indian career, whilst travelling in Eastern Bengal, F—— observed,



hanging to a tree, a singular thing in the form of a cross, made of iron hoops, apparently rusty from extreme age and desuetude. On enquiry, he learnt that it was no less than a man-cage, an interesting relic of the past. As far as he could ascertain from local tradition, dacoits were formerly placed in it when

captured, and left suspended to a tree by the roadside as a warning to others ; but whether they were hung up alive and left to die a lingering death, or after they had been deprived of life, he could gain no satisfactory information : the former, however, is by far the most natural hypothesis.

We have now to descend a steep bank to a 'nullah,' or river, sixteen men, awakened by the sounds of the coachman's bugle, being in readiness to assist us, which they do by holding on to ropes attached to the gharee, to prevent its being precipitated too rapidly down the

incline; and well is it that we cross the river under cover of darkness, and do not see our ferry—a frail platform of bamboo, placed upon two canoes. But safely arrived on the other side, the same number of men push us up the bank, uttering a chorus of the most unearthly yells, and in process of time we reach the dāk bungalow at Siligoree.

Siligoree lies within a short distance of the foot of the Hills, and close to the malarious Terai—a belt of jungle, where some years ago Lady Canning, the wife of the Governor-General of India at that time, the ‘Lily Queen’ as she was often appropriately called, caught jungle fever from staying here one night only, on her way from Darjeeling, and soon afterwards died at Calcutta.

From this place we have our first glimpse of the snowy range, one or two of the loftiest peaks just peeping over intervening mountains, as if to show us something of the glory that lies beyond, and the view looking across the broad Mahanuddee—a shallow river, but clear as crystal—is very imposing with the dark belt of jungle at its base. We do not linger here, however, for the Terai is the abode of leopards, tigers, the wild elephant, rhinoceros, boa-constrictors, and other objectionable reptiles and fauna; and for every reason is it unsafe to pass through it—a distance of eight or nine miles—after sunset.

The road, broad and level, is enclosed by dense cover on either side. To the right, to the left, before and

behind us, nothing is seen but dense and impenetrable jungle. And this is by no means an agreeable part of our journey; for although the creatures I have mentioned are not given to display themselves to the nervous traveller between the hours of sunrise and sunset, yet the mere knowledge of their existence kept us perpetually on the alert, each movement of a branch suggesting a tiger, every rustle in the tall dry grass, a serpent.

Terrible tales are related of the manner in which natives have been attacked when passing through it at night, which they sometimes do in companies. And there was nothing to prevent their attacking us, had they been so minded, in broad daylight: but there would have been no one to describe the tragic scene, for not a wayfarer did we meet the whole distance. We passed, however, a skeleton of more than one cow, telling its own tale of midnight orgie.

Having reached Garcedura, a small village on the other side of the Terai, we found, to our disappointment, that the ponies we expected to be waiting to take us on to Punkahbaree, although ordered several days ago, had not been sent. Unwilling to delay our journey, I—decided on walking, and after much difficulty succeeded in obtaining from one of the villagers an uncovered hackery for myself and the baggage. In the next page will be seen the interesting picture I make, jolting along the road, restrained in my longings to wrest from the driver's hand the goad with which he keeps poking first

this poor beast, and then that, and retaliating upon him with good measure for his cruelty, only by the consoling reflection that probably *they* had likewise been bullock-drivers in some previous existence, and that their turn had come at last



Although the ascent to Punkahbaree is gradual, the character of the flora changes at almost each step. We have already lost sight of palms—those melancholy trees so distinctive of the plains—and passing by a large tea plantation, we make our triumphal entry into the little station, where there is an exceedingly nice staging bungalow, in which we put up for the night, starting the next morning for Kursiong, our last resting-place before reaching Darjeeling.

We have now exchanged the vegetation of the tropics for noble forest trees, which clothe the mountains that surround us in confused masses on all sides, and which constitute what are called the Outer, or Sub-Himalaya. Looking back whence we came, we see stretched below us a vast and almost limitless Steppe, the plains of Bengal ; and the eye wanders over billows of blue mountain, each lessening in height as it nears them, till the last is seen to merge into the vast ocean-like expanse, that ceases only at the horizon.

The syces (grooms) in charge of our ponies having arrived during the small hours, we leave Punkahbaree the following morning, whilst the dew still lingers on the sward, and begin zigzagging up the steep path, between banks covered with ferns and lycopodia, shaded by gigantic trees draped with a soft net-work of *leguminose*, in flower, which in many instances cover their trunks completely, and hang from each branch in long filaments like ships' cables. Orchids cling to the moist bark with slender thread, their succulent leaves and wax-like blossoms contrasting sweetly with the vivid green of the moss, which often forms their bed. White and purple *thunbergia* cover many of the less lofty trees, the wild banana, and the spider-shaped leaves—eight feet broad in many instances—of the *pandanus* palm, whose glorious plumed head waves gently to and fro in the morning breeze ; and having ascended two thousand feet since leaving Punkahbaree, we meet with oaks, birch, and

other trees, which recall to memory one's native land, and the change of climate as we proceed becomes very perceptible.

A ride of six miles brings us to Kursiong, our first introduction to which is a dismal and dilapidated little graveyard, situated close to the roadside, with no fence whatever surrounding it, the dusty, forsaken-looking mounds being hardly recognisable amongst rank weeds and grass.¹ There is always something very sad, in approaching the haunts of men, to have the truth forced upon one's mind, that wherever the living congregate, there must also be a place set apart for the dead; and although a common truth enough, it is yet one to which somehow we never grow quite accustomed. But this neglected little place impressed me with unusual sadness, containing as it does the graves of those who have died in exile in this strange though beautiful land, on which no loving eye has probably ever gazed, or tender hand has strewn a flower.

A gentleman at Kursiong, not personally known to us, but merely a friend's friend, having heard of our coming, sent a messenger to Punkahbaree to await our arrival with a letter, containing, with true Indian hospitality, an invitation to spend a few days at his house *en route*; an invitation it would have been almost ungracious to refuse, even had not inclination prompted our

¹ It was not until a year later that the pretty little church now standing was built, and the cemetery consecrated, planted, and enclosed.

availing ourselves of it, which it did in this instance, for we were both truly rejoiced at the prospect of a little rest. The house is a charming one, and, unlike those we have hitherto seen in the hills, built very much in the English style. It stands on the extreme summit of a conical mountain, backed by mountains higher than itself, covered with rhododendron and magnolia-trees, and commanding deep blue valleys on either side; but although we are now at a considerable elevation, we are as yet scarcely on the threshold of the wondrous Himalaya, and see little more of the snowy peaks than we did at Siligoree. Nor have we quite lost sight of the plains, basking in the sunshine 6000 feet below. How parched and arid they look, even from this distance! and how thankful we feel to have left them behind, as we breathe health and vigour with each inspiration. How our lungs expand and our nostrils dilate, whilst breathing these exhilarating and life-giving breezes! which enable us to realise the more fully all we suffer in the lowlands of Bengal.

Here we are initiated not only into the new delights of a blazing wood fire, but also into the far-famed hospitality of a planter's household, than which nothing can be more perfect and well-bred; perfect, not only because it is real and hearty, but because no *gêne* is imposed upon the guest, who is regarded in every respect as one of the family circle, there being no such thing as restraint or 'doing company' on either side. Accord-

ingly, on arrival we were at once shown into the suite of rooms appropriated to our use, a native servant soon following with a message from his master, enquiring whether, as we were doubtless fatigued by our long ride, we would not prefer taking breakfast alone in our own apartment.

In the afternoon our host proposed a canter to a tea plantation some miles distant, a proposition to which we very readily responded ; and leaving the house at four o'clock, we were soon traversing a bridle path through the very heart of a primeval forest, our Bhootia ponies, accustomed to the roughness of the path, alternately trotting and cantering, their speed alone hindered by fallen trees, which occasionally lay across it ; whilst we ourselves were often obliged to bend to our saddle-bows to avoid being decapitated by low-hanging branches, or entangled by the air-roots, that festoon the trees in long garlands, sometimes reaching to the ground.

After an hour's quick ride, we come suddenly upon the estate ; and here the glorious forest trees have been cut down to make way for the cultivation of the tea bush, the mountain slopes laid black and bare in all directions.

A tea plantation is eminently unpicturesque, and only interesting, I should imagine, to the eye of a planter. From a distance it presents the unromantic appearance of an exaggerated cabbage garden—acres and acres of stunted green bushes, planted in rows, with

nothing to relieve the monotony of form or colour. The leaf is highly glazed, and not altogether unlike the laurel in shape, though much smaller ; whilst the flower, which has a sweet perfume, is precisely like that of the large kind of myrtle, at least to a non botanical observer. In passing through the estate we saw it in all stages



of its growth, from the fragile seedling, struggling into existence through the hard dry soil, to the full-grown shrub.

Women and children—who appear to us wonderfully fair after the natives of the plains—are employed in plucking the leaf, which they throw into long upright baskets, the men being reserved for the more laborious

operations of hoeing, planting, etc. We pass groups of patient women thus busily occupied, whilst wee babies, from ten days old and upwards, in shallow baskets made to fit them, lie speckled about the ground ; placed by maternal solicitude beneath the scanty shadow of the tea bushes, each looking like a little Moses, minus the bulrushes, by the bye. Miriams, however, are not wanting, nor Pharaoh's daughters either, to complete the resemblance.

The costume of these women is very Hebraic in style, often reminding one of the paintings of Scripture subjects by the old masters. Not unfrequently they shield the head with a white or red cloth, folded square, the end hanging down the back after the manner of the Neapolitan women, or else turban-like wound *round* the head. Their dress is composed of the brightest colours, the three primaries often being seen in combination ; somewhat questionable now, however, by reason of untoward vicissitude of wear and tear, but all the better for artistic purposes, yielding a gradation of mellow 'half-tints,' over which Carl Haag would go perfectly mad with delight.

In the middle of the plantation we come to a long low range of buildings, where the green leaves are rolled, dried, sorted, and finally packed in square chests ready to be sent to Calcutta for exportation. When the leaves are first plucked, they are thrown into large trays made of thin strips of bamboo, and placed some hours to fade in

the sun, after which they are more completely withered by being warmed over a charcoal fire; and are then spread out upon tables, beaten, squeezed, and crushed by the palms of the hands, till the leaves are rendered thoroughly moist by the exuding of the sap, when they are again placed in the sun, before being subjected to the first roasting process. For this purpose they are



thrown into large pans, and tossed about till sufficiently dried; when they are once more rolled by the hands, again roasted in shallow trays, till perfectly crisp and dry, and the tea is considered ready for the market.

In the manufacture of the 'cup that cheers' there certainly is no lack of *manual* labour, and I think, as a tea-lover, I half regretted having witnessed the process, for it is one of those many cases in which ignorance is bliss.

Then on again by group after group of tea-gatherers, the children looking still more like little Moses, now that we have descended to the region of the waving *pampas* grass, and they are laid beneath its shade.

Having ridden over fifty acres of plantation, we have now reached its limits, and find ourselves surrounded by wild raspberry bushes laden with ripe fruit, the flavour of which is much fuller and richer than that of our English raspberry, and, being slightly acid, is not a little refreshing after the heat of the tea-house, which was almost unbearable. But how our faces and hands were scratched, and my riding habit torn by encounter with its treacherous brambles!

To vary our ride we re-ascended the mountain by quite another way, entering the forest in an easterly direction. Shadows were lengthening by this time, but the birds were singing still; amongst them the thrush, and above all other,—the blessed little thing!—here for the first time in India we heard the cuckoo; upon which F—— and I simultaneously reined in our ponies to listen to it. What a surprise it was, that home note in the solitude of this great Indian forest! whilst the plaintive vespers of the little creature, making me feel how many thousand miles we were away from our loved ones in England, caused the very inmost chord of my heart to vibrate, and brought a choking sensation in my throat, which I found hard to get rid of with undimmed eyes. What glorious orchids, too, we saw that day, and what exquisite pendulous lycopodia! and how many sweet-scented wax-like flowers of the magnolia we gathered and stuck into our ponies' bridles to carry home!

At the time of which I write, there was no church at

Kursiong, and the spiritual interests of the planters and residents generally, of the little station, were left almost uncared for ; the military chaplain of Darjeeling occasionally holding Divine Service there, on his way to Jelpigoree—a place he is obliged, amongst his other duties, to visit every few months.

The following day, however, being one of the exceptional Sundays, morning service was to be held in a 'rest house,' as it is called—simply an empty building with four walls roughly roofed in, and used for the soldiers to sleep in on the march to or from Darjeeling—whilst a resident having magnanimously offered to lend a harmonium for the occasion, I was asked to improvise and conduct the choir.

I had had considerable experience of the manner in which musical instruments get out of order in India, not only by the ordinary effects of climate, but also by the ravages of white ants, which not unfrequently take up their abode within them, blocking up the whole machinery by building little walls of primitive masonry, sometimes in a single night ; but the prudent measure of testing the capabilities of this one in particular, before doing so in public, unhappily did not occur to me. Accordingly, when I began the usual voluntary, the clergyman's advent was ushered in first by a screech, then by a howl, followed by a deep groan, after which I gave it up in despair ; but the gentleman, whose precious possession it was, rising to the occasion, at

once came forward, and performing some mysteries with the pedals, declared in a decorous whisper, that it would 'go all right now.' On the faith of which encouraging assurance, in due time I began playing a chant for the *Venite*; but the assurance proved a delusion, for the poor thing was so hopelessly gone in the wind, and was so asthmatical—it was evidently a chronic disorder—and it sent forth every now and then such groans and gasps and piteous sighs, that I once more relinquished it, and took to pitching the chants and hymns in a tremulous soprano. The daughters of our host, however, having good voices, quickly took up the strain, and the congregation, who had not had Divine Service for months, or music at one for a longer period still, and who were apparently easily satisfied, declared the singing was charming, and the whole thing a success!

To our minds, at any rate, accustomed to the exciting as well as deeply impressive Military Service of the plains—the 'Parade Service,' as it is called—there was something wonderfully quaint, unconventional, but interesting withal, in the utter simplicity of this one. The homely little building in the midst of the mountains, the people gathering together from such great distances—in some cases wending their way over ten miles of rough pathway—and their devout demeanour, somehow carried one back to the days of the Covenanters, and possessed an impressiveness all its own.

CHAPTER VI.

DARJEELING AT LAST.

It was a lovely dewy morn, that on which we started for our destination twenty miles distant, our kind host having sent a relay of ponies the previous day to await our arrival at Sonadah, rather more than half way. The road from Kursiong to Darjeeling is a very broad one, skirting the mountains, and winding round their stupendous flanks, very much like the famous Cornice road made by Napoleon I., connecting Nice with Genoa, only on a much grander scale. What azure depths and dark green sombre forests, stretching up, up to the stainless blue! How nobly the broad road winds, and how exciting it is to canter side by side as we breast the wind, which comes borne over icy regions, now not so far away!

We had not gone more than two or three miles, when we observed, on turning an angle of the road, two men driving a herd of buffalo, large bony animals, stalking leisurely along, their skinny necks outstretched, and square nostrils snuffing the air, as the manner of them is, whether indigenous to mountain or plain. As we rode up, however, instead of their passing us and

proceeding on their way, as we naturally expected they would do, for some reason or other they took fright at our formidable appearance, and wheeling straight round, took to their heels and galloped off as hard as they could go ; whilst the cries of the herdsmen, and their endeavours to keep pace with them and turn them back, served but as a signal for our ponies to start off too ; and away we went giving involuntary chase, soon leaving the men far behind, who kept shouting to us in beseeching accents to stop, and not drive their kine away they knew not whither, their voices growing fainter and fainter each moment, as increasing distance separated us.

From the first, I had lost all control over my fiery little steed, and it was as much as I could well do to keep in my saddle ; whilst F—— having his own by no means well in hand, it would have been quite impossible to rein them in at this part of the road, which was almost level ground. At length, coming to a little path diverging from the roadway, the buffalo took advantage of it, and fled from their pursuers down the mountain side ; with the exception of one big fellow, who, slightly in advance of the rest, overshot the mark and could not turn in time to follow. Infuriated at finding itself deserted by its companions, it dashed on a few paces, and then turned round and faced us boldly, ten yards ahead. Then, as F—— brandished his whip and shouted loudly, it dashed off once more, but only to return to the charge again and again ; and it was ‘ On, Stanley, on ! charge,

Chester, charge !' for more than a mile, when coming to another mountain path, it also happily left us, and was soon lost sight of amongst the thick brushwood below.

Long before we had time to recover our composure after the little episode just narrated, we were overtaken by one of those dense fogs, of which we had ample experience during our residence in Darjeeling, and which rendered fast riding out of the question. Nor was it easy at all times, even when riding slowly, to steer clear of the hackeries, and the long strings of ponies we met, scarcely more than four feet high, laden with sacks and protruding packs of the gipsy order, all of which had an uncomfortable way of rubbing against us as they passed.

Having, as we imagined, ridden about twelve miles, and accomplished nearly two-thirds of our entire journey, F—— accosted the driver of a hackery, and enquired how far it was to Darjeeling.

'*Sāt kos* (fourteen miles),' was the reply ; a *kos* being equal to two English miles.

Proceeding onwards yet another hour, we saw an old pilgrim plodding along the road, to whom F—— repeated the question. After gazing intently at the top of his staff for some moments, upon which he was leaning, as though he expected to find the answer written there, he slowly counted on his fingers, like one making an abstruse calculation, and muttered in Hindustani, 'Well, there was Sonadah, and that was *tīn kos* (six miles), and then there was "the Saddle," and that was

chār kos (eight miles); and then there was Darjeeling, and that was *ek kos* (two miles), and that made *āt kos* (sixteen miles) altogether.'

'What!' exclaimed F——, lifting up his voice, 'have we then been going backwards the last hour, misled by the fog? Or are we condemned to journey on perpetually, like the Wandering Jew, never to come any nearer to the goal?'

'*Hogā, sahib, hogā*,' rejoined the old man, encouragingly, reading an expression of disappointment in our faces, and making use of that provoking idiom, so peculiar to Hindustani, which forms the vague and indirect answer to nine out of every ten questions you may ask a native, embracing as it does the past, present, and future tenses, as well as the conditional and potential.

For instance, if you ask a servant, 'Is So-and-So coming to day?' he will reply, '*Hogā, sahib*,' meaning *may be*. 'Did he come yesterday?' he will still reply, '*Hogā, sahib*,' signifying he might have come; and so on. On this occasion, therefore, *hogā* was intended to convey the consoling assurance, that although Darjeeling was *āt kos* distant yet, and a long way off, still, if we persevered, it *would be*, i.e. we should arrive there at last.

And so we did; at any rate, people told us we were there: a crowd of hackeries to steer through, and fowls and pigs and children to be ridden over, and visions of huts frowning down upon us on either side of the road, all exaggerated in the darkling mist, and a

mysterious voice proceeding from the shadowy outline of a native, telling us he was our 'bearer,' who had arrived before us with the luggage, and was waiting to conduct us to the house that had been secured for us.

* * * * *

Standing under the porch of our pretty mountain dwelling the morning after our arrival, what a sight presented itself to our view! 'See Darjeeling and die!' has become a familiar aphorism now; and well it may, for how can I ever hope to be able to describe the awful beauty of the snowy range from this spot! Grander than the Andes and the Red Indian's mountains of the setting sun; grander than the Apennines and Alps of Switzerland, because almost twice their height; grander than anything I had ever seen or dreamt of—for what must it be, think you, to fix your gaze upon a mountain more than 28,000 feet high, rising 21,000 feet above the level of the observer, and upon which eleven thousand feet of perpetual snow¹ are resting, rearing its mighty crest into the very heavens! Overcome as I am by its grandeur and majesty, I will not attempt a description of it now, for language fails me, but leave it to develop itself as I proceed in my narrative, and the eye once grown familiar to the scene, emotion grows fainter, and forms itself into speech.

¹ The line of perpetual congelation in the Western Himalaya is about 17,000 feet above sea level, so that 11,000 feet of snow are lying upon Kinchinjunga even in the summer months; and in the winter it descends, of course, considerably lower still.

CHAPTER VII.

WE PURSUE ART UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

THIS sweet little cantonment, the sanitarium for Bengal, became British territory in 1835, together with a small tract of adjacent hill, ceded by the Rajah of Sikkim to enable our Government to create a convalescent depôt for its troops; in return for which favour it agreed to give 300*l.* per annum as compensation, the Rajah's 'deed of grant' expressing that he made this cession out of *friendship* to the British Government; little thinking, in his amiable simplicity, that Darjeeling would ultimately become the key to Sikkim, Nepaul, and Bhootan, or he would doubtless have been less generously disposed.

Its native population numbers upwards of 20,000, consisting of various tribes, Bhootias, Lepchas, Limboos, and Goorkhas; the three former having originally migrated from some province in Thibet. They are, for the most part, an inoffensive and peace-loving people, particularly the Lepchas, a nomad race, natives of Sikkim, who possess many virtues and none of the vices of the more highly civilised dwellers of the plains, the Mahomedans and Hindoos.

The dress of these mountaineers is exceedingly picturesque, varying with each tribe as greatly as their language. In a climate like that of the Himalayas they are, of course, fully clad, the material being composed of some warm woollen fabric, woven by themselves in small triangular looms, after a very primitive manner. The Bhootias wear a long loose robe of some brilliant colour; brilliant, that is to say, until subdued by the mellowing influences of time, and its concomitant. This is confined at the waist by a long narrow scarf or girdle, the front of the robe above the waist forming a natural pocket, or 'opossum-like pouch,' in which they keep, when travelling, their little worldly all. I have seen one Bhootia produce from his pouch a canine mother and several puppies for sale, and another any number of cats! whilst from their belt hangs a very formidable knife, fully half a yard long, enclosed in a leathern scabbard, often highly chased with silver. A powerful, square-built, and very manly tribe, armed with these knives, they appear not a little hostile, some experience of their harmless habits being necessary, before one can feel altogether at ease in living amongst them. They are, however, on the other hand, a very wily and cunning people, with much of the Chinese nature about them; and when one of old gave utterance to that memorable and not very complimentary statement regarding the truthfulness of mankind, he most assuredly made no exception in their favour.

Very different in each respect are the gentle Lepchas,

who are truthful and honest to a singular degree, those who have had transactions with them declaring that seldom if ever have they known them commit a theft or tell a lie. Their complexion is fair and ruddy, but of that yellowish tinge observable in all the Mongolian races, and, like the Chinese, they are oblique-eyed and flat-faced, giving one the idea that they must have been accidentally sat upon when they were babies, and that they have never got the better of it since.

These peculiarities, however, are more common amongst the Lepchas of Darjeeling, for in the 'interior' of Sikkim, as I afterwards found, when we made a tour to the region of perpetual snow, they frequently possess great regularity and even beauty of feature. These people are intelligent, and great entomologists, scarcely an insect or tiny earth-worm existing for which they have not a name: but although they have a written language, they have no recorded history of themselves. They are much smaller of stature than the Bhootias, and effeminate looking, partly from the fact of possessing neither beard nor moustache, which they destroy by persistent plucking. They also part the hair down the middle of the head, plaiting it into a tail reaching below the waist. Rightly have they been designated the 'free, happy, laughing, and playful no-caste Lepcha, the children of the mountains, social and joyous in disposition.' They are, however, an indolent race, taking life easily, and when not basking in the sunshine when there is any, or huddling

inside their huts with the pigs when there is none, their favourite occupation is butterfly catching, with which they contrive to earn a tolerable subsistence, almost every visitor to Darjeeling, scientific or otherwise, making a collection of *Lepidoptera*, for which the neighbourhood is justly celebrated.

The costume of this tribe consists of a long striped scarf or toga, fringed at each end, with which they drape themselves in an exceedingly graceful manner, allowing one end to fall loosely over the shoulder. A bow, a quiver of poisoned arrows, and a butterfly-net complete their equipment, not forgetting the knife, or 'ban,' suspended from a red girdle, a long straight weapon enclosed in a wooden sheath, quite different in shape from those used by other tribes, called 'kookries,' which are short and curved.

The dress of the women of each race is almost alike :
a short petticoat, striped with green, red, blue, and orange, tight bodice, with chemisette and sleeves of white calico, or a long white robe open down the front, and worn over all. Those of the better classes adorn themselves with gold and silver filigree ornaments, in which real agates and turquoises, procured from Thibet,



are sometimes set; whilst a tiara of black velvet, ornamented with large coral or turquoise beads, encircles the head. They also wear amulets, or charm-boxes, containing prayers and relics of departed Lamas, such as nail pairings, &c.; and happy and thrice blessed is that fair one supposed to be—her fortune, in fact, made for life—who possesses that most precious of all relics, a departed Lama's tooth.

The Lepchas, though an indolent race themselves, do not allow their wives to enjoy the same privilege, but constitute them their domestic drudges, agricultural labourers, and beasts of burden also. They do not marry young, like the natives of the plains; and when they *do* marry often have to pay heavily for their wives, a Lepcha father frequently making a small fortune out of the sale of his daughters; some few, on the other hand, being sold for the modest sum of one rupee (two shillings). Occasionally the marriage is permitted to take place before the money has been paid; but in that case the husband becomes, like Jacob, the bondsman of his wife's father, and the wife never leaves her father's house, until the stipulated sum has been either worked out or paid in full.

The planters exempt their coolies from work on Sundays, a circumstance the latter take advantage of, by going to the market, or 'bazaar,' as it is called, to make their weekly purchases. This is situated in a large open space, where the vendors of woollen cloths made in

Bhootan, silks woven from the fibre of a worm that feeds on the castor-oil plant, grain, vegetables, and other produce, all squatted on the ground, display their wares. It is consequently always at its fullest on Sundays, when the people, clad in every conceivable colour and costume, flock to it in crowds, and, collected together, form a very interesting and picturesque scene. On one side of the bazaar is a Mahomedan mosque, surmounted



with its white cupola, where the devout sons of the Prophet, who have migrated hither from the plains, are wont to resort at their hours of prayer. Above this is the convent, and beyond all, bathed in sapphire, stretches a wondrous expanse of mountain, half filling the sky.

It is one of the prettiest sights possible to see the picturesque mountaineers wend their way upwards from the plantations on their way to market, dressed in all their Sunday best, their hair often adorned with flowers. The ears of the Lepchas and Limboos have large holes in them, from the perpetual dragging of heavy silver earrings; and these they not unfrequently fill with flowers, sometimes those of the large pink magnolia, sometimes the scarlet blossoms of the cotton-tree: the women carry their children on their backs in baskets; and there

never were people, I really think, in all the world, half so merry, and free, and light-hearted as these.

Not only are the people themselves picturesque, but all their surroundings, which add not a little to the beauty of the landscape, with which they harmonise marvellously. Their brown huts dot the mountain slopes, the blue smoke curling through the thatch in graceful wreaths, whilst groups of bright-robed figures, sitting or standing about the doorways, form a kaleidoscope of perpetually moving colour. Although by no means indigent as a rule, they love to live and burrow, in tattered huts, surrounded by every kind of squalor, where they and their numerous progeny—the goats, the sheep, the poultry, and the pig—exist in almost one common apartment, and lie down together a happy and contented family party. A pig to these hill tribes is not the loathsome, unholy, and unclean quadruped it is in the estimation of the Mahomedan and Hindoo, but their much respected brother, with whom in life they love to fraternise, and in due time, when slain, to eat.

Their abodes form perfect studies for a painter; but perhaps they never look so entirely picturesque as at nightfall, just when, the sun having set far beneath the horizon, the mountains, cerulean blue, are veiled in a dreamy haze. At such times these huts, perched on the ledges of the hill-sides, in all their rich deep colouring and ragged outline, a bright fire burning within the open doorway, form pictures indeed.

At one period of my Darjeeling career, I haunted the Bhootia village, or *Busti*, as it is called in the language of the hills, which is situated about half a mile from the station; and I may say, in strictest confidence, that I became almost part of it myself, till the very pigs began to recognise and greet me, with a contented sort of grunt, as I sketched the dearest, raggedest, dirtiest of tumble-down tenements, getting to know the dwellers, and their little black-eyed flat-faced children. At first I and my easel were regarded with the utmost suspicion—I must have the gift of the evil eye, they thought. For what other purpose could I desire to set down their ragged homesteads on paper, and carry them away with me, if it were not to weave some spell to harm them? My first appearance therefore amongst these happy simple folk ushered in a reign of terror; but as time wore on, and neither their children nor cattle died, neither did their huts topple over the precipice, they began to look upon me as an inevitable,—a grievance to be borne. Then would they come running up to meet me, as I appeared, a tiny speck on the ridge of the mountains, beneath which their village is situated, fix my easel for me, go to fetch water, sometimes even insisting on holding my colour-box, which was doubtless provoking, as were their comments upon my proceedings and presence generally; but I had no heart to repulse them. Sketching, surrounded by a crowd, even though it be an admiring one, is anything but agreeable, as all know who have tried it,



and whispers are perplexing, even though they may be complimentary.

'Oh! one would say, the spokesman of the party, the mem sahib is *writing* the fence'—they always called it 'writing'—'and look! now the hole in the thatch.'

And as I dabbed in the colour, another would whisper, 'There! she's *writing* my old moon'—which are hanging up to dry'—the representation of any of their personal belongings always appearing to afford them more than ordinary amusement. Then I threw in another little dab of colour, and they recognised the pigeon, perched on the gable of the hut I was sketching—birds they hold sacred—or any other object of their especial interest, a subdued chorus of 'Ah—a—a—a!' would follow from the whole admiring crowd.

But they never really annoyed me except when, in anticipation of my arrival at their village, they attempted to tidy up the outside of their dwellings. Sometimes, whilst I was in the very act of sketching one of their huts, they could be seen all hurry and bustle, scrimmaging here and there with switches and impromptu brooms, sweeping away the delicious rubbish heaps—the accumulation of years—upon which I had set my artistic affections. Once, in an incautious moment I happened to tell them I intended some day or other to make a picture of their village as it is one. Their delight knew no bounds, and the next morning soon after, whilst sitting at breakfast, I found that several Lepchas and Bhootas were waiting for me.

to see me, where I found a deputation, headed by a stately old Bhootia woman, who begged to inform me 'the village was quite ready, would I come to-day to write it down.'

Suspecting some treachery or other, but willing to gratify them, I did start, armed with easel and sandwiches for a long day of it; but what was my horror, on reaching the brow of the hill, to find the village tidied up in earnest, and decked out as for a gala day. Some of the huts were covered with little streamers, and fresh green boughs tied to bamboo stakes; wooden palisades had been mended, and their enclosures swept and garnished; and, as if this had not been enough, they had actually whitewashed the outside of the little Bhuddist temple itself; the old dowager's hut had positively a new roof on, and she herself, decked out in all her finery, was standing at the door, vigorously twirling a 'mani', (praying machine) without stopping for an instant, evidently imagining I could, amongst other wonders, even represent 'perpetual motion' in my sketch.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE CANTONMENT.

AT a safe and respectable distance from all the interesting and picturesque squalor of the village, on the crest of the hill, at an elevation of seven thousand feet above the level of the sea, stand the houses of the English residents; and above these, by several hundred feet again, in a singularly bleak and exposed position, on the narrow ridge of a mountain, the hospital and convalescent depôt are situated: but how the authorities could have chosen such a spot for our invalids is incomprehensible, when the neighbourhood abounds with more sheltered sites, where a fine bracing air can be obtained at the same time.

Here they are enveloped in swooping mists for nearly half the year, which bear down from the higher ridges, or ascend from the valleys on either side. Higher, still higher, in very cloudland itself, rises Senschul, the former site of the military depôt, selected in days when even greater idiocy prevailed, as may readily be imagined when I say that this mountain, protecting Darjeeling from the south-east and encountering the first burst of wind

and rain, is popularly called its 'friendly umbrella!' Long ranges of deserted, and now ruined, barracks may still be seen from Darjeeling, on rare occasions, when the clouds open and display them to the astonished gaze of anyone who may happen to be looking skyward.

Near the station itself, the mountains are becoming more bare each year, as the forest is cut down for tea-planting; and those who would witness the glorious vegetation with which the steeps are covered, must leave Darjeeling behind, and canter through the woods with a loose rein, heedless of danger and narrow stony paths.

The banks at and about Darjeeling are thickly studded with stag moss, and the little yellow calceolaria; the latter very different, however, from the highly developed flower of the same name, so familiar to us in England. At some elevations also the sweet little forget-me-not is found, with its meek eye reflecting the blue of heaven, as well as that loveliest of all flowers, the lily of the valley; and how delightful it is to think of this still being left to grow in England, as it came forth fresh from the hands of God, and that, although we have, alas! double violets and double snowdrops, no wretch has hitherto had the hardihood and audacity to introduce to the world a double lily of the valley. I have gathered it growing wild on the Wyndcliff, South Wales; on the steeps of the Rhine; on the mountains of the Himalaya; in the gardens of the rich and poor alike in my own dear land;

yet that lowly, pensive little flower, lowly, but queenly in its beauty, and noble in its unsullied purity and grace, is everywhere the same.

Beneath Senschul are dense forests of scarlet and white rhododendron, as well as of the beautiful magnolia, and the woods here are one mass of gorgeous colour during the months of March and April, when they are blooming in all their glory. Rhododendrons attain to a great height at this elevation, and the flowers grow in immense clusters, the white species particularly—a noble tree forty or fifty feet high—the leaves of which are exceedingly thick and rigid, measuring scarcely less than a foot long. The most beautiful of all, however, is a species of rhododendron which grows *epiphytically*, after the manner of our mistletoe, and which, clinging to the branches of trees belonging to other species than its own, may be seen drooping with its weight of sweet-scented flowers, each white bell four or five inches long, and as many broad, suspended by a slender stem.

At the time I write all are in full bloom, the large cup-like blossoms of the white magnolia speckling the woods, and looking from a distance like newly-fallen snow lodged in the branches. At a higher elevation the pink magnolia grows, with its exquisite fleshy petals; and everywhere *such* ferns, just now radiant with their bright new fronds! Such orchids, ablaze with colour! Such veils of hanging moss! Such loveliness, living, breathing, palpitating around us, that it fills one's heart

with a sweet but indefinable sadness to look upon. I wonder why things that are very beautiful should make one sad. Is it because they are so fleeting, so transient? Does it not lie in the consciousness, deep hidden within ourselves, though unthought of at the moment, that 'all that's bright must fade,' and, ah me! that even whilst we admire and love things, they are passing away—fading from our grasp? Yet if we had them always, we might not prize and hold them dear, as now—who knows?

Truly earth is here decked in nature's most sumptuous garment, and the fairest and noblest works of God are seen in perpetual alternation, constituting it an earthly paradise, and a world of wonder and æsthetic mystery, to those who have eyes to see, and grateful hearts to recognise, not only the wondrous beauty in all around, but the hand of the great Architect and Artist which has created such loveliness in form and colour. Looking upwards, the majestic Kinchin cleaves the very heavens, and brings them down to meet it, whilst in everything the Infinite is unveiling itself to finite man, if he will but see it.

Very beautiful is it to watch the clouds float beneath these transcendent and eternal hills, and to follow the shadows they cast upon their lustrous surface, sparkling and shimmering in the noontide sun; yet still more beautiful to watch them at eventide, when at the 'sun's quiet hour of rest' shadows lengthen, and the orb of day, sinking behind the rugged peaks, sends upwards a flood of golden

light, bathing them in hues of amethyst and rose—then they are almost unearthly in their splendour.

To my mind and wild imagination, however, a lover of the passionate in nature, the view from Darjeeling is never so entirely grand and magnificent as after a storm. How often from my mountain eyrie have I watched the clouds, and their marvellous and ever-changing effects, when a tempest, which has raged throughout the livelong night, has lulled and sobbed itself to rest, with the rising of the sun. Huge cumuli may then be seen hanging about the highest peaks, whilst the valleys and mountains of the Sub-Himalaya are covered by a vast horizontal stratum of vapour, heaving into wild billows mightier than Atlantic rollers, and stretching right away to the snows fifty miles distant; whilst here and there a bold head of some mountain, higher than the rest, stands out in solitary grandeur, like a rocky island in the Indian Ocean, the cloud-drift blown against it half covering it as with foaming surge.

At one period of the year we actually live in the clouds, and those who wish to study cloud effects should pay a visit to Darjeeling, for they are indescribably grand; and much as the place is disliked by some, in consequence of its frequent gloomy weather, I like it on this very account. There are few natures to whom perpetual sunshine is congenial, and best do I love the days, when clouds sailing over-head throw shadows dark and mysterious over the landscape, enveloping all things in

alternate glow and gloom. What sudden bursts of sunshine and gloomy blackenings! affording a power and variety in nature's colouring, by force of contrast, that uninterrupted sunshine ne'er can give; and when a rift in the cloud admits a shaft of light, now here, now there, the whole becomes a perpetual dissolving view, and distant objects are seldom seen alike. Now that mountain peak, which we had always regarded as a vertical wall, is seen to have a lower one beneath it, as a cloud passing between it and the upper one throws it out in strong relief; now a ray of sunshine shows *that* to be a glacier, which we had previously imagined to be the shadow of a projecting rock; and so, there is no day when to me Darjeeling is not perfectly delightful; ay, even days of densest fog are welcome sometimes, for how delicious now and then to be perfectly *chez nous*, when one can settle down comfortably, feeling sure of no interruptions by the enemy from without; for who would think of running the risk of breaking one's neck over the precipices that must inevitably be passed to reach one's dwelling? And is there *anyone* who does not enjoy days of solitude and sweet home life, when one is completely alone? At any rate, I do; but then I am an ' anchoress,' they tell me, and so I love Darjeeling, not only on sunny days and cloudy days, but *all* days.

Unfortunately, ordinary visitors to Darjeeling see it at its very worst; the months when it is hottest in the plains, during which persons rush to the mountains, hap-

pening to be those of mist and rain here ; but in my great love for these mountains, and anxiety to make excuse for their occasional sulky behaviour, it is consoling to remember that we once stayed at Chamonix three weeks, and never saw the summit of Mont Blanc throughout the whole period. It is not often, however, that the Himalayas treat the visitor so discourteously, Kinchinjunga seldom hiding his stately head for more than two or three days together, and when at length the veil of mist withdraws, and he is seen standing out sharp and well-defined against the liquid azure, in his spotless robe of newly-fallen snow, so glorious is the sight, that to look upon it but for one instant is worth long and patient waiting.

This stupendous mountain has been seen, when the sun is in a certain position in the heavens, to cast its shadow on the sky ; and on a clear day the snow can always be observed drifting like a little white cloud from west to east, which has given rise to the belief in many persons that there is a volcano on its summit, the so-called cloud being mistaken for smoke issuing from a crater. But no one who has ever seen a distant mountain in a state of eruption would think so for an instant.

I was fortunate enough to see Etna, not only near, but from a distance, many times, in 1868, when, Vesuvius slumbering, Etna was burning on an unusually grand scale. From a distance of fifty or sixty miles its smoke appeared to ascend in rounded masses, in the form of

cumuli ; so did that issuing from Stromboli, which I also once beheld in a state of eruption ; whilst the appearance I have referred to, proceeding from the summit of one of the peaks of Kinchinjunga, and seen from the same distance, is more like that of dust blown by gusts of March wind, only, of course, perfectly white.

There are some things that make a lasting impression on the memory, and I shall not easily forget my first acquaintance with Mount Etna. It was one calm mellow evening that we gradually approached it. Away in the distance stretched the long dark-blue line at its base, the sky, scarlet where the sun had set, fading upwards into orange, then into yellow, then into citron and faint pink, till it terminated in greyish-blue. Standing out boldly against this, like a huge cinder, was Etna, pouring out columns of black smoke, as from an immense chimney, whilst every now and then an occasional flame appeared, resembling a flash of lightning, showing that it was still in a state of eruption.

Travelling towards it, we lost sight of it for a while behind nearer hills, and darkness had already set in, and Ursa Major appeared above the horizon by the time we arrived close under it. At this moment it was in repose, and the long red line of reflection hanging in the sky above the crater, and the smoke issuing from it, were the only indications of its existence. Soon, however, there was a sudden burst of light, and a column of fire shot upwards, carrying large pieces of lava with it.

Then another ominous lull, followed by another flash, which came so suddenly that, even as we watched for its appearing, its great brilliancy made us start. It was altogether, though a magnificent, a very appalling spectacle, the darkness at one moment so great, at another the flame proceeding from the volcano illuminating the whole expanse of firmament, whilst the heavy, lowering, confused mass of smoke hung immediately over the crater. This unusually brilliant display of Etna took place, as I have said, when Vesuvius and other volcanoes were slumbering; it consequently became the principal safety-valve of Europe, and it certainly made one realise, as nothing else could, the tremendous forces that are at work beneath the surface of this calm and peaceful earth of ours, each moment that we breathe.

This has been a digression, but the remembrance of it suggested itself, as I sat one day at my easel, sketching the western peaks, and watching this little white cloud drifting off the flanks of Kinchinjunga, and losing itself in the depths of the azure dome. I had heard no sound of approaching footsteps, and was therefore not a little startled on hearing some one close behind me speaking in broken English :—

‘ That big mountain *thar* is Junnoo, mem sahib ; and him *thar* is Kubra.’

Looking round, I saw a pretty Bhootia girl, spinning, apparently about nineteen, but probably younger—women generally looking older than they are, in all countries of

the East, even amongst the Hills. She continued to talk the whole time I was sketching, and when I had finished, insisted on walking part of the way home with me, to carry my easel, &c., pattering along by the side of my pony with her little naked feet, every now and then snatching a



wisp of long grass from the banks, and giving it to him to eat. She told me her name was Lattoo, and that she had learnt English when living in a missionary's family, as a child; and there I fancy she had learnt habits of cleanliness also, being very different in appearance from the Lepchas and Bhootias one sees at Darjeeling, more cleanly and refined, and in every respect superior to her class. Her features, too, were very regular, and almost European in their type; and her figure, clothed in the picturesque costume of these mountaineers, was full

of natural grace; and I was so struck with her from the first moment I met her, that it ended in my asking her to let me take her likeness.

Accordingly, the next day she presented herself for the purpose decked in all her pomps and vanities; and after this I often saw her on my solitary rambles, sometimes driving her father's kine home, which she had led at sunrise to graze in higher pastures; sometimes standing beside me as I sat sketching, prattling away in her pretty broken English, which always amused me greatly, or softly singing to herself some Tartar melody, holding the distaff in one hand, whilst she twirled the wool deftly between the finger and thumb of the other; and with her red or white 'saree' folded square over her head, a style both Lepchas and Bhootias frequently adopt, what a sweet picture she made.

The primitive spinning-wheel is yet an unknown wonder, and far too great a novelty in the art of manufacture to have yet reached this mountain-land, and the web or thread is consequently made entirely by hand.

From one of my favourite sketching-places I could just see the smoke wreathing upwards through the roof of Lattoo's hut, 4000 feet below; and emboldened by familiarity, she one day asked me to come down and see it. Her father was a man of substance, and accounted rich amongst his people, owning swine and poultry, not to say a herd of buffalo, and several cows; and a more picturesque little place than his dwelling could

hardly be imagined. It was situated several miles away in the valley, or rather gorge, of the Rungnoo, for the valleys in the eastern Himalaya are narrow and V-shaped ; and this one was more than ordinarily so, the river tearing along over its highly inclined and rocky bed, between almost perpendicular mountains, clothed with dense vegetation, half shutting out the sky. A little to the right a waterfall could be seen chasing itself over moss-covered boulders down a narrow ravine, and then flowing into the river.

The hut, which was entirely of wood, and ascended by a ladder, was erected on the declivity of the mountain, one side of it supported on stakes ; the roof, formed of bamboo, being thatched with the dried leaves of Indian-corn, from which baskets of various kinds were suspended. Outside the hut fishing-nets might generally be seen hanging out to dry, and a little below it, growing over a rough trellis-work of bamboo, the passion-flower trailed in the greatest luxuriance. One often meets with it in these valleys, particularly in that of the river Balasun, below Kursiong. A few upright stakes of bamboo are stuck into the ground, and others tied horizontally to them to form a roof, similar to the way the vine is trained in the south of Italy, and it is then left to grow as it will ; the fruit, hanging in long yellow balls the size of an egg, being much esteemed by the natives ; and very delicious it is, for I have often eaten it.

The first evening I visited this little homestead the

cows and buffalo were all arranged for milking, and the scene was pastoral in the extreme. Inside the hut, too, they were making butter and "ghee," the latter made from buffalo milk; a disagreeable-looking substance, perfectly white, but much used in India for culinary purposes. The butter, however, looks and tastes much the same as our own, and is made by a very primitive process, churns also being unknown amongst



these people. The milk is first scalded and then laid in shallow pans, and allowed to remain until the cream is clotted, and slightly sour. It is then skimmed and placed in long bamboo tubes, often four or five inches wide, and three feet deep, called 'chongas,' and these are shaken till their contents turn into butter, which is then taken to the bazaar for sale in large untempting-looking lumps.

Having once gone there, I returned so often, that my little pony, once started on the road, needed no guiding, but always turned sharply down the narrow pathway of itself, threatening to throw me sometimes, when my thoughts were far away, and I was bound for a more distant ride. But his desire to go there arose from no sentimental attachment to the picturesque little spot, but rather, I suspect, from a remembrance of certain delicious feasts he was invariably indulged in, whilst I was gossiping with Lattoo; for when I rode down to see her, she not only pressed me to take milk, fruit, cakes made of dried curd, and such things as her simple life afforded, but extended her hospitality to my little white steed also, for which she lopped branches of the large bamboo. It is true he had plenty of bamboo leaves to eat in Darjeeling, but then they were of a smaller kind, and not half so luscious and succulent as those he met with there, at so much lower an elevation. Women are often as handy in the use of the 'ban' as men, and Lattoo never looked so pretty, or her figure so entirely graceful and lithe, as when fighting with the long canes, oftentimes thirty feet in height, which, by waving first on this side and then on that, seemed like sentient things to be resisting her attempts to cut them, only that she might handle them the more. Indeed, was there ever a time when she did *not* look pretty? my poor little Lattoo,

Attracted by the interest she saw she had awakened in me, by degrees she was with me more and more; and

when I did not meet her on my solitary rides, or go to see her at her home, she would find her way to mine, and could be often seen standing shyly outside the portico, but never empty-handed. Sometimes she brought fish, sometimes butterflies and beetles, for, like the rest of the world, she knew we were making a collection of them ; at other times, the ripe yellow fruit of the passion-flower, or some new wonder in orchids. At length, instead of shyly standing outside, she ventured within the mysterious precincts of the mem sahib's '*ghur*,' or dwelling, till she became quite domesticated in it, and my interest in her grew and grew till it ripened into something like affection. There was an irresistible fascination about this singular girl, and she somehow became a necessity to me—a part of the scenery, and of my happy mountain life.

Sometimes, sitting on the margin of the river, I read to her, when, throwing herself at my feet, she would listen with rapt attention. She understood English sufficiently well to feel interested in what she heard ; but having been more accustomed to the stories of the Bible, she would often ask me to read them to her in preference to any others, for, related in its sublime but simple language, they always seemed to reach her understanding more readily than those of any other book, conveying with them all the force of reality. On the other hand, I found it very difficult to impress her with any degree of reverence for the sacred volume, which she regarded in the light of a

merc story book, and was convulsed with laughter one day whilst I was reading the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, as she pictured to herself the dilemma of those whose lamps had gone out, and who were overtaken by a fate she thought they too richly deserved ; and when she saw I was angry, and closed the book, she implored forgiveness, and the next moment was all tears over the pathetic history of the Prodigal's return. She was a child of impulse, and had never been schooled into keeping her emotions under control.

She had not only lived in a missionary's family for some years when a child, but until the death of her mother, which took place two years before the time I first knew her, she had gone every day to take charge of, and amuse, the little daughter of one of the planters in the neighbourhood, which would account for her continuing to speak English. But since her mother's death she was miserable at home, her father ill-treating her in consequence of her obstinate adherence to a young Lepcha, whom he disapproved of as a suitor, intermarriage with the hill tribes not being of frequent occurrence : besides which he was poor ; for although Lattoo's father was a man of substance, the lover's father possessed neither huts nor land, but earned a precarious subsistence by catching fish in the rivers, and selling it at Darjeeling ; and Atchoo (the lover) he had contemptuously called a 'loafer,' in the vernacular, a good-for-nought, who only kicked his legs backwards and forwards in the sun.

In vain Lattoo argued that he possessed a 'ban;' and what more did a Lepcha need wherewith to begin life, to whom it was everything? With *it* he could make his own way in the world, and in time own huts and land and buffalo too, as did her father. Was it not to *his* 'ban' he owed everything?

But it happened, unfortunately for Lattoo, that a Bhootia in Sikkim, whose hut was half hidden by orange-trees and sugar-canes, on the other side of the valley, had crossed over the border, and also sought to win her. Atchoo had no money to pay for *his* bride—the greatest of all obstacles to a Bhootia father—but this rich suitor had offered to pay 400 rupees (40%) down on the spot, and that sum her father, who besought her to be his, had reproachfully reminded her would pay for another herd of buffalo, and procure a comfortable independence for him in his old age. He even sent for a 'Peedangbo' (priest) to bring his 'mani,' or praying cylinder, to exorcise the evil spirit he believed must have got possession of her, inciting her to disobedience. But, in spite of all these pious efforts on the part of the priest, Lattoo would have nothing to say to him.

Marriages amongst the hill people are sometimes arranged when the parties are still children; but not so in this instance, and Lattoo, arrived at the age of maturity, had evidently determined, after the English custom, to choose for herself.

'Why should I marry a man I don't like, mem sahib?'

she said to me one day, 'just because he has a plantation of sugar-canes and orange-trees, and bhoota (Indian-corn). He brought me a bangle yesterday, all gold, as big as that ; but I told him I would have none of him or his, and bid him begone.'

I had never seen Atchoo, whose name was somehow always associated in my mind with a *sneeze*, but my impression was, she did not really care for either of her lovers, being spoiled for the society of her own people by having lived so long amongst Europeans, and that she only encouraged him, as many a tender-hearted woman will, simply because he was ill-spoken of and spitefully ill-treated.



CHAPTER IX

I MAKE A STARTLING PROPOSITION.

WE had been denizens of this cloudland already eighteen months ; had learnt much of the happy mountaineers and their simple lives ; had eaten steaks—and very good ones too—of rhinoceros, shot in the ‘terai ;’ had ridden through primæval forests of birch, oak, walnut, and the pink and white magnolia ; had climbed its heights, and forced our way through thickets of the scarlet rhododendron ; had been sometimes overtaken in these expeditions by such thick mist that it required no little squinting to see the tip of one’s own nose, not to say one’s pony’s, and the return homewards became a perilous enterprise ; had scrambled down pathless mountain sides to explore deep valleys, in which are fastnesses and rushing torrents which Salvator Rosa would have loved to paint ; when the longing I had felt, ever since my eyes first rested on that stupendous amphitheatre of snow-capped mountains, ripened at last into such strong determination to have a nearer view of them, before bidding adieu to this sweet land for ever, that one evening as we were sitting cosily in F——’s sanctum over the blazing wood-fire, he

smoking, and the fog literally trying to force its way through the keyhole, I cautiously broached the idea of a grand tour into the 'interior.' Upon which he gave me a look of much astonishment, and without taking the cigar from his mouth, but speaking in that staccato manner, so habitual with smokers, replied :

' I always knew, my dear—puff, puff—that it was useless — puff — to expect women — puff, puff—to be rational — puff, puff ; but I never knew until this moment — puff—to what lengths you *could* go.'

But I saw by the twinkle in his eye, and the plastic lines about his mouth, which he vainly strove to hide, that I had only to keep up a judicious agitation, administered in small but frequent doses, to have my way in the end. And if these means did not answer, well then, I must make use of stronger measures, and bombard the citadel, for to go I was determined.

The former and milder measures succeeded, however, and it was not long before he sent in an application for three months' 'leave,' that he might travel with me whither my fancy led. The 'leave' was speedily granted, and everything now favoured my making the long-wished-for journey, across trackless wastes to the snows.

Few Europeans, and no lady, had hitherto attempted to explore the Eastern Himalaya, which, as will be seen hereafter, present greater difficulties to the traveller than the peaks of the *Western* section, approached from Simla and Mussoorie, which are much easier of access. On the

other hand, the mountains within reach of these stations are far less lofty; but we shall be travelling towards Mount Everest and Kinchinjunga—the two highest mountains in the world—the whole way, so that if Darjeeling does not, as a starting-point, afford the same facilities in the matter of roads, &c., we shall at any rate have something to reward our enterprise.

The perpetually snow-clad mountains of the great Kinchinjunga group, it must be understood, form an impassable barrier, incapable of being crossed; it is, therefore, our intention to cross the range of intervening Alps till we reach their base, and then explore the glaciers, unless the weather at this season of the year should prove too inclement to admit of our doing so.

Many were the predictions that, even if F — returned alive, I, at any rate, should leave my bones to whiten on some mountain-top; and many were the warnings of anxious friends, who did their utmost to induce us to relinquish so rash an undertaking; but zest was only fostered by opposition, and we set about making preparations in real earnest. Moreover, we were not to go alone, for a friend, having heard of our proposed expedition, offered to be of our party, and, furthermore, insisted on our being his guests on the way, so that we only needed the requisite number of baggage coolies to carry our tents and 'impedimenta' generally, the commissariat being cared for wholly by him; and henceforth this friend will be known in these pages under the unostentatious little

initial C——, albeit a mighty potentate in the eyes of the natives of the province, whose destinies he ruled with mild and beneficent sway.

Unfortunately every season seems to be unsuited for travelling in the Himalaya. During the 'rains,' camping out is dangerous in the extreme on account of malaria. In March, April, and May it is, if possible, worse still, the whole country being enveloped in dense mist for days together. And although from October till March one can insure fine weather, and an absence of fog in the lower elevations, yet on account of the extreme cold, and absence not only of Alpine flowers, but fruit, upon which the Lepchas can almost wholly subsist, this may also be said to be a bad season; yet it is the best of any, as Major Sherwill, Revenue Surveyor, found, who travelled due north from Darjeeling in 1861. Accordingly our plans were laid for starting in November.

Having engaged a *sirdar*, or head-man, to procure coolies, and make the necessary arrangements for the march, F——, not liking to lose any portion of his leave, suggested that we should take a preliminary trip of ten days' or a fortnight's duration to the valley of the great Rungheet, and follow its silvery banks till it is joined by the noble Teesta, thence to cross the border into Bhootan, just to put our *al-fresco* capabilities a little to the test.

We were much 'exercised' at first as to the way we could best shelter ourselves by night, in the valley whither

we were bound, far removed as it is from every vestige of civilisation. During the day the shade afforded by the branches of a tree would be sufficient in a climate genial as that of the valleys, and where at this season no rain is anticipated. But on confiding our difficulties to Dr. S——, an erudite and experienced traveller in the Mongolian wilds, he suggested a leaf or 'Lepcha hut,' as it is called, believing we should find it more cool and pleasant than a tent.

A Lepcha hut is made of boughs, interlaced between and over stakes, which are driven firmly into the ground, the floor being carpeted with dry ferns and moss; and his description of it sounded so completely rural, harmonising so entirely with the pastoral frame of mind we happened to be in at the moment, that we at once fell in with the suggestion, discarding a tent, as an appendage of that effete civilisation we were so anxious to get beyond; but 'experientia docet,' and for results, anon.

Meanwhile to live in a bower! How romantic, how sweetly Arcadian! That *would* be doing the *al-fresco* with a vengeance. Already we picture to ourselves Flora and her nymphs spreading our carpet of ferns and moss, and covering us with leaves, like the babes in the wood; sylvan gods and goddesses feeding us with nectar and ambrosial food; whilst the Dryads or wood nymphs dance before us in the moonlight.

Not having seen Lattoo for many days, and wondering much the reason, before starting, I rode down to see

her. It was one of those sweet mellow evenings, when one felt grateful to be a living creature, and everything around was so exceeding beautiful and fair, that one's heart seemed filled with one great outburst of praise and thanksgiving to God: the sky was bathed in a rich golden haze, the long undulating sweep of mountain outline, cutting into it with deep blue; whilst the valleys below were sleeping in soft pale shadow. From the little huts that nestled here and there, half-concealed by trees, the smoke curled idly. All was still and peaceful, the universal hush of nature alone broken by the sound of my pony's feet, as he scrambled over the loose stones that lay everywhere along the pathway, and the musical trickling of water from tiny streamlets gliding down the forest-clad declivities, and hidden deep in perennial greeneries of moss and fern. A balmy air stirred with gentle rustle the massive fronds of the tree-fern, and swayed the long and leafy air-roots to and fro that hung from the loftier trees. Now and then peasants crept noiselessly up the mountain-side with 'chongas,' or pitchers, to a place where the stream, eddying down with greater force, was caught in troughs of bamboo; at which having filled their vessels, they returned to prepare their simple *pot-au-feu*, stooping now and then to gather wild herbs with which to flavour it; each, on recognising the '*Taswir* mem sahib,' as they called me (pronounced *tasweer*), greeting me with a kindly smile, or some such words as follow:—

‘It is late for the mem sahib to write the trees. Lo! the sun is sinking, she will be overtaken by darkness.’ Or,

‘My *beta baba* (baby boy) is grown big, and will sit quite still now if the mem sahib will but come and paint him; and the tree she liked is in full blossom, and the fruit of the passion flower that grows over the thatch is ripe: she must come and see it.’

Presently, however, I heard a querulous voice, which I soon recognised as belonging to an old woman who assisted Lattoo in taking care of the kine. She was talking to herself as she came along, gesticulating angrily, and her eyes fixed steadfastly upon the ground: she had not seen my approach.

‘What’s the matter with you, Gwallah?’ I exclaimed; ‘has anything happened at home?’

‘Matter! happened!’ she replied, looking up with a startled expression and speaking in broken Hindustani, and here and there a word of English she had learnt from Lattoo. ‘Ah, well! what’s the use of talking? talking won’t make things different;’ and then, as if unable to keep silence any longer, added:

‘How can these two hands be expected to milk the beasts, and fetch water, and do all sorts besides, and at my time of life? Look;’ and she exposed her poor wrinkled skinny arm. ‘Is it right, I ask you?’

‘But where is Lattoo? She used to help you.’

‘Lattoo indeed. She’s only been a fine lady since the mem sahib wrote her face, and had her up to her own

house so much, and thinks of nothing now but sticking flowers into her ears and such like, and the sooner she herself goes over the *black water*¹ and reaches Ballat (England), the better. She's no good here; and there's no good either in a Bhootia girl keeping company with a wandering Lepcha, who's never got any house to live in worth speaking of.'

And I felt that the old woman was right here, for the Lepchas seldom stay more than three years at most in one place, and are essentially a nomad people.

'But who am I to say anything?' she continued, ironically; 'the mem sahib is going down to the hut, and will see all for herself;' and with a mocking laugh and shrug of the shoulders she went on her way.

The buffalo had already been driven home, for I could see them in their shed long before I reached it; and fully expecting to find Lattoo, as usual, spinning or weaving in the balcony, I touched my pony with the whip and hastened on; but on arriving at the hut I found it empty. Thinking she might be somewhere about the place, I called to her loudly, but received no answer. Some one had been there recently, however, for the fishing-nets, which were hanging out to dry in the sun, were still wet. Climbing the ladder I entered the hut. It was composed of one large apartment, divided in the centre by a partition of matting; logs of wood were still smouldering on the hearth, and a large iron pot, containing milk

¹ *Black water* is the term invariably used by natives for the sea.

which had been scalded, and had not yet had time to grow cold, was standing beside it. In another stood the butter-milk, poured from the 'chongas' after the cream had been churned : but all this I knew was generally done by her father, and Lattoo might not have had any hand in it whatever.

Passing through the outer room, I entered the inner, by a doorway in the partition. There was her bed of dried ferns in the corner, raised on a dais of bamboo, as I had always seen it. There was the little altar with its grotesque idols supported by two rudely carved elephants, but the little things that were usually strewn about were there no longer : an old silver charm-box, which she told me had belonged to her mother, and which always hung over her bed, was gone also ; and feeling by intuition that she had left home, I rode away with a heavy heart, wondering much whether I should ever see her again.



CHAPTER X.

THE HAPPY VALLEY.

HAVING made preparations for a fortnight's absence from home and the haunts of men, we secured the services of six Lepchas to go on a day in advance, not only to construct the habitation in question, but to convey our stores. These principally consisted of hermetically sealed provisions, bread, a little stock of live *moorghees*, a supply of wine, and the universal 'Bass'—which provision for the necessities of the inner man is unquestionably very humiliating; but in these degenerate days, food for the eye and the mind is, after all, but sorry consolation to the body. Fancy 'Bass' amongst the gods! 'And why not?' broke in F——, somewhat absently, at my elbow, who had just been helping to pack these creature comforts, and despatching the men with them, we ourselves having arranged to follow at daybreak on the morrow.

And what a cold morning it turned out to be! Standing at the door of our chalet, waiting for our ponies to be brought round, we could see that the ground was covered with a thick coating of hoar-frost, which made the surrounding world, at least as much of it as was visible at

that dreamy hour, look perfectly white. The mists that invariably ascend the valleys, like the breath of the morning, to greet the rising sun, had not yet appeared, but were still hovering about the mighty rivers far far below, or lying in sleepy hollows in the mountains; and the stupendous peaks, with their miles of virgin snow, were standing out sheer, stately, and solemn, like giant phantoms against the darkling sky, where pale stars were feebly shining, as though they were weary of their long watch over the sleeping world, and were wondering how long it would be ere the sun would rise to take their place and relieve guard.

In another instant Kinchinjunga, the centre and proud monarch of them all, was tipped with vermillion; then followed other peaks in rapid succession, till the effect against the still cold and opaque sky, whilst the world beneath was also hovering between darkness and dawn, was precisely that of their having been kindled by some mighty hand, for as yet the extreme points only were illuminated, and the glaciers and vast rocky valleys of the snowy region were wrapped in that mysterious ghost-like gloom impossible to describe, and which must be seen even to be imagined. It was just the sight to awe one into silence, and after a start of surprise, we were involuntarily subdued by the majesty of the scene.

'Hush!' I heard F—— say, scarcely above a whisper, 'Do they not look like Titanic fires?'

The effect I have been endeavouring to describe is,

however, quite unlike that which, seen at sunrise on the Swiss Alps, I have loved to watch, when that tender roseate hue, like a faint blush overspreading them, gives to expectant Earth her first intimation of the approach of Day. These mountains of the Himalaya, from their exalted position in the heavens, catch a glimpse of the sun when he is still so far below the horizon, that his rays have no influence upon that portion of the earth visible to us, and before even Dawn, the forerunner, has appeared. In the universal darkness and gloom therefore that brood over all, these giant fires, against the almost sable vault of heaven, appear terribly weird and supernatural.

But as we silently stand and gaze, see! the glorious sun ascends, and each pinnacle and spire becomes irradiated with softer tints of opal, and the sky is filled with an auroral brightness, although *we* are in grey dawn still, and the silent valleys at our feet are bathed in the deepest sapphire, save where a translucent well of vapour floats calmly like a lake.

But our ponies by this time have been brought round, and are manifesting signs of impatience to be off. So we mount, and are *en route* at last, zig-zagging cautiously down the steep mountain, the crisp frosty ground scrunching beneath their feet. Leaving a forest of birch behind, we soon reach the Bhootia Busti, through which we have to thread our way. All here is still wrapt in slumber, and the men, women, and children,

the pigs, poultry, and pariah dogs, are severally dreaming of their happy hunting grounds. Sitting shivering at the closed door of one of the huts is a wretched-looking pariah. He makes a dash at us as we pass, barking furiously, and seizes F——'s pony by the tail, whilst a pig gives a grunt of approval from within. Everything seems to think we have 'waked them too soon, they must slumber again.'

The clatter of our ponies' hoofs and the yelping of the dog have by this time created a general stir. Doors open, and Bhootias, and shrivelled old women like mummies and dried potatoes, stand and look at us sleepily over frail wooden balconies. On past the little white temple, sacred to Budh, with its cluster of many-coloured flags hanging helplessly in the still morning air: on past huts tanned with smoke, so bolstered up with sticks and stakes that it is a perfect marvel how they contrive to hold together at all, their mat and mud walls so battered that one can often see through them into the very lives of the people themselves: on, till a pink family of infantine pigs stops the way, which now joins in the general exodus—'leedle peegs,' as my attendant syce (groom) calls them, proud to exhibit the few words of English he knows;—how they scrimmage hither and thither in frightened tumult, and how, in their praiseworthy endeavours to get *out* of the way, they hopelessly get *into* it, and under our ponies' feet, till at last the old sow, frantic with maternal forebodings, rushes to the rescue, utter-

ing shrill squeaky gutturals : on, till the little colony with all its dirt and apparent wretchedness is left far behind, and our ponies, picking their way—for they need no guidance, and know best themselves where a sure footing may be had—scramble down the steep path, treading often so closely to the edge, where the roughness of the way obliges them to do so, that my habit absolutely hangs over the 'khud' or precipice, and I hold my breath, for one false step might hurl me down the abyss. These hill 'tats,' as they are called, have an exceedingly



uncomfortable way of hugging the 'khud' side of the path, a consequence of having, before they fell into European hands, been made by natives to carry large leathern bottles of oil, spirit, and other liquids, or sacks of grain, to and from the foot of the hills. These loads, strapped each side of them like panniers, compel them to

keep to the outside of the narrow mountain pathways to get along at all, and this habit they ever after retain.

Nature has adapted the Sikkim pony peculiarly for climbing, and they canter up the mountain steeps with marvellous speed. A few days after our arrival at Darjeeling, the wife of the chaplain, who was riding up from the station by the zig-zag path that led to the garrison, reined in her pony—an impetuous little animal—too

abruptly. The pony reared, fell backwards, and was instantly killed ; the lady herself, although greatly stunned by her fall, and picked up in an insensible state, happily sustaining no further injury. This was a circumstance not calculated to inspire a stranger with confidence; but it is wonderful in how short a time one grows needless of danger in this keen mountain air, and how one loves to fly before the wind, fast riding, although unquestionably 'bad form,' becoming a perfect passion in these hills.

These hill 'tats' are often very stubborn little creatures, as well as occasionally given to inconvenient fits of contemplation, sometimes insisting on pulling up short, at the most dangerous parts of the road, as if to work out their ideas there and then ; at other times, when they know they are carrying a timid rider, and one innocent of spurs—and what pony doesn't ?—they will stand at the very brink of the precipice, and calmly survey the scene below. Nor is this practice so strange as it may at first seem ; the Bhootias who rear them having their dwellings somewhere down the mountain declivities, they may possibly catch sight of the thatch of their humble birthplace, and be thinking with fond regret of some former happiness no longer theirs. Accustomed to climb these heights in their babyhood, like Alpine chamois, they have been known also to carry a lady down the 'khud;' but this, fortunately, is of rare occurrence, and although the sensations of the fair equestrian in the former case cannot be envied, she has only to shut her eyes, and wait

patiently till it has finished its moralising, when it will go on of itself as before.

Our way now lies through banks clothed in a rich garment of lycopodia and ferns, tangled together in the most delicious confusion and abandon of nature it is



possible to conceive—forming a bewildering maze of beauty ; amongst which, here and there, if you look for it, a modest violet may be seen hanging its head, and trying to hide in the tufts of moss—that little flower, so loved and sung of by the Ancients, and treasured still, thank God, even in our own prosaic days.

All is glistening with dew, for by this time we have

zig-zagged below the region of frost, and meet with a gentle shower-bath occasionally as we brush through the foliage and the long fern fronds which overhang our pathway.

Descending further, we come upon ferns that will not grow at Darjeeling, the banks being now white in many places with the tender fronds of the 'silver fern,' the little sensitive things shrivelled up by the cold, except in sheltered nooks and corners, even in this warmer locality. Another thousand feet, and we see them growing vigorously everywhere, and although aware that we shall be in their midst for days to come, I cannot resist the temptation to stop and gather them, they are so exquisitely and irresistibly lovely. The syces, too, decorate our ponies' heads with them, to keep off the flies.

And now we have descended to the region of the tree-fern, that most beautiful of all the Himalayan flora, of which we pass many groups growing on either side of the pathway, their fronds of tender green forming Gothic arches overhead, covered with a rich tracery of parasites and delicate climbers clinging to their stems. The lower we descend the more luxuriant vegetation becomes. We now pass through forests of sol, its stately trunks covered with epiphytical ferns, air plants, and gigantic climbers, which, twining themselves round everything, hang from bough to bough, and stretching out their strong arms catch hold of neighbouring trees, till the whole forms a fresco-like canopy of many-coloured leaves. Another hundred feet,

and we observe a magnificent parasite enveloping the trunks and branches of numerous trees from top to bottom, its highly glazed leaves, fully three feet long, being pinnated like a palm. In splendid contrast to this is the lofty cotton-tree, its bark silvery white, and scarlet blossoms the size of a man's hand, the ground beneath being carpeted with soft down which is discharged from the full-blown flower.

Approaching tropical vegetation, we now pass beneath the drooping heads of the *pandanus* palm, and have to pursue our way cautiously, for the path is not only rough and narrow, but so terribly steep, that it is almost more than we can do to keep on our ponies, and I feel strongly inclined—there being no spectator—to lay hold of the pommel of my saddle, or the pony's mane or his tail, or all three together if I could, indeed anything and everything, to enable me to hold on. In one place the path is almost perpendicular, but my brave little steed takes me down without stumbling in the least, pausing now and again over the most dangerous bits of the road with a sagacity that seems something more than mere instinct, as if he were pondering with befitting gravity which is the best way to proceed. Presently I become conscious of the absence of the clattering hoofs of F——'s pony, and looking back, or rather upwards, for they seem to be impaled on the very sky, I behold him using every persuasion to induce his steed to follow the example of mine; but nothing evidently is further from its intentions,

for that noble animal has planted its fore feet on the extreme edge of the descent, its whole attitude and expression manifesting a strong determination to proceed not another inch. So refusing to be brought to terms by any argument whatever, it calmly lies down, and rolling over, gets rid of its rider without further ceremony.

F——, thus ingloriously vanquished, wisely decides to



give up the contest, remembering that 'discretion is the better part of valour;' and once more on his pony at the bottom of the descent, we zig-zag down a less precipitous part of the mountain, till a river, as yet invisible, thunders at our feet; and we soon reach the valley, where we find we have to cross a mountain stream—an affluent, I believe, of the greater river—by a very insecure bridge

scarcely more than two feet broad. F—— dismounts here, and leads my pony across; and once on the other side, we have to force our way through a forest of mimosa, familiarly called the sensitive plant in England, attaining however in these latitudes a height of fifteen or eighteen feet. As we pass, the leaves close, and the branches droop with a gentle 'sough' or sigh, making one half believe they must be living things. At each step we tread down clusters of the golden fern, which forms the undergrowth of the forest, and grows with as great luxuriance as our common bracken on English moors; and then at last we come in sight of the white banks of the beautiful Runghet, lashing itself into spray over boulders of 'gneiss,' its surface disturbed by myriads of transparent and perfectly green waves, as it tears madly along.

This noble river, which takes its rise amongst the glaciers of Kinchinjunga, winds through a stupendous gorge, the precipitous mountains on either side stretching upwards many thousand feet, densely clothed with magnificent primeval forest, from the luxuriant tropical vegetation that skirts its banks to that which is indigenous to cold latitudes only. It is impossible to describe at all adequately the exquisite and almost heavenly beauty of the scene, or the delicate colouring of the rocks and boulders on the margin of the river, which is that of porphyry and alabaster, contrasting quite ethereally with the metallic green of the water.

We seem suddenly to have been transported into fairyland, and all is more like an extravagant dream than reality. Gorgeous butterflies of every hue are sailing in the air, or sunning themselves on the banks, where sitting with wings erect they look like little Dutch galiots at anchor, the most numerous amongst them being the large 'swallowtail' species, robed in black velvet with scarlet spots on their wings, and long antennæ. Birds in plumage of scarlet, blue, and orange, flit among the branches of the majestic sol; and a perfectly marvellous little creature, belonging to a species of lepidopterous insect, with a vermillion body, and wings of transparent and glittering emerald, hovers above and around us in multitudes, whilst the air is filled with a melodious chorus of happy creatures. But what strikes one more than all, after the great beauty of the scene, is the wondrous variety and number of living things, earth and air alike teeming with life.

The only human inhabitants of the valley are a small number of native police, stationed here by the British Government, the river being the boundary between what is called *independent* Sikkim and Bhootan.

Although our servants started an hour earlier than we did ourselves, four of them are loitering behind—viz. that very important functionary the cook, the kitmutgar, and the ponies' leaf-cutters. It had previously been arranged that we should halt here for the purpose of giving ourselves and our ponies rest, and after our exciting ride of

twelve miles of road, such as would seem absolutely impassable to persons uninitiated in travelling in the mountains of the Himalaya, we are sorely needing some little refreshment, but have unfortunately to await their arrival, as they carry with them the provender not only for the ponies, but for ourselves also. Taking shelter in one of the chowkeydars' (policemen) huts from the burning sun, F—— sends a native to shout for them, believing they cannot be far off; nor is he wrong, for the shout, which is echoed up the valley, is quickly answered, and all join us in half an hour, when they proceed to prepare our breakfast beneath the spreading branches of a tree a little distance off; for to *eat* in the chowkeydar's hut, who is a Plainsman, would be to defile and render it unfit habitation for pious Mahomedan for ever, and, temptingly cool and scrupulously clean as it is, we have to yield to the prejudices of caste.

While the kettle is boiling over a camp-fire we unpack the baskets to get at the edibles, and some cream we brought for our tea, believing that milk even, in these unpeopled regions, would be too great a luxury to expect; but, alas! it has changed its character entirely by this time, and contains, instead, a consolidated yellowish mass, commonly called butter!—a result not very greatly to be wondered at certainly, seeing that it had been subjected to a violent churning process for the last four hours, but it was nevertheless one which, in our utter ignorance of such matters, we had never anticipated.

Last evening, just as I was retiring to rest, I was told by my ayah, who had heard it from the 'bearer,' who had been told by the kitmutgar, who had seen a Lepcha woman, who had been to the 'bazaar' and learnt it from a Bhootia, who had heard it from somebody else, that a '*burra*,' (great) sahib, accompanied by a numerous retinue, was also going down to the Teesta to-day, and was moreover to encamp at the bridge. Now, these were hard lines, to say the least of it, and provoking beyond everything: my heart sank within me. Not once in three months was anyone known to seek these wilds at all, and now to think that he should have chosen the very same day that we did. Had not our men already gone on with provisions, &c., I should have endeavoured to persuade F—— to postpone our visit till this great man's return. In my perverse character of ' anchoress,' I had hoped to have the beauteous valley all to ourselves. It is true, as he somewhat sarcastically observed, we should find plenty of room; but in my day-dreams I had pictured myself as a sort of Lady of the Lake, with flowing hair. We were to be Paul and Virginia over again; but how had my bright visions faded, 'leaving not a wrack behind'!

Who can this '*burra*' sahib be? was a question I asked of F—— a hundred times, who hinted—he was in a provokingly sarcastic mood—that perhaps it would be as well to wait and see. A retinue of servants, however, suggested Eastern magnificence. Could it be the Emperor

of China, or the King of the Cannibal Islands, or—oh, agonies! worse still—one of Cook's tourists, or Cook himself, perhaps, come to spy out the land and reconnoitre for the enemy? Yes, that was it—we saw it all—we had long ago expected it. Was it likely that these beautiful solitudes would remain uninvaded much longer? Falling to sleep at length with the impression strong upon me, I was haunted by tourist apparitions. I saw hosts of them bearing down upon us: English tourists, hot and eager, Murray and alpenstock in hand; lanky American tourists come to *do* the Himalayas, singing 'U-pi-dee;' lively French tourists, shouting '*Vivent les Alpes Indiennes!*' heavy Prussians and German students, with ponderous spectacles on nose—undemonstrative but admiring, '*Ach Himmel! wie wunderschön!*' with frequent, prolonged, and deeper mutterings of '*Ja wohl!*' and '*Zo—o—o—o!*' in linked sweetness long drawn out; poetic Italian tourists, with large grave eyes, gazing in silent wonder. On they came—they came—and still they came, till the most distant tourist was but a mere speck on the horizon.

Meeting a surly-looking Bhootia woman, leading a cow, on our way hither, we enquired whether she had heard who the '*burra*' sahib was, who intended coming down to the Teesta to-day, and where he came from; upon which she stated that, for her part, she didn't know who he was, or where he came from: all she did know was, that his servants had arrived, for she had met them

on the way, and she supposed the '*burra sahib*' would soon follow.

It was but too true then ; he was a stern reality, and the object of our direct hatred until this identical instant, when F——, who had been talking to one of the '*chow-keydars*,' came running towards me, with the joyful news that he had assured him, on repeating the enquiry, that it was not only a '*burra sahib*,' but a '*mem sahib*,' and that *we were they* ; and we discovered that we had all along been afraid of our own shadows.

Considerably refreshed in body and relieved in mind, and having given our ponies a long rest, we start at noon for the Teesta, fourteen miles further on. Our path now lies along the shady banks of the river, and we find ourselves literally enclosed on one side by golden ferns, which grow to an enormous size, their stems fully three feet high, with fronds in proportion. We meet with the pretty fragile maiden-hair also in abundance ; as well as a climbing fern in full fructification, with broad fronds, its tiny tendrils reaching out towards everything for support, the most perfectly beautiful thing I ever beheld. On the other side of the path, tall flags of the pampas-grass are growing between the white boulders, as well as the dwarf date palm (*Phoenix acaulis*) ; and this part of our ride, though more devoid of incident, is by far the most enjoyable. Not wishing to hasten over it, we gently walk our ponies, and revel in the fair scene around, each turn in the broad river

seeming to present even greater beauty than the last. Sometimes we meet groups of Bhootias, on their way to Darjeeling with merchandise, which they carry either in long baskets or bundles tied to a kursing or bamboo frame, which is strapped to their shoulders.

At length we reach the splendid Teesta, which flowing through a gorge scarcely less stupendous than that of the



Rungheet, hastens to meet it from its birthplace, the bosom of the Choma lake, in Thibet, and which is formed of melted snow. A finer sight than the junction of these two rivers cannot well be imagined. The water of the Teesta is metallic green, but turbid; that of the Rungheet clear as crystal, whilst the two may be seen to flow on together for a considerable distance, without mingling in the least, like the rivers Aar and Rhone at Geneva.

We do not linger here, however, the Teesta *bridge* being our destination, two miles further up the river, and

putting our ponies into a canter, we quickly come in sight of it. Here we are met by our advanced guard of baggage coolies, whom we despatched with stores and baggage yesterday, and one of whom we find to be a woman. But we were prepared for this, our 'khansamah,' who surely ought to have been an Irishman, having gravely informed us previously, that one of the six Lepcha *men* whom we commissioned him to engage for us, was the wife of a Bhootia; and a very fine specimen of the Mongolian race she is, her face both flat and sallow. They have not made a hut expressly for us, however, here happening to be one already at the foot of the bridge, the temporary abode of some other nomad; and here it is.



CHAPTER XI.

'FOOTSTEPS OF ANGELS.'

WE are certainly disappointed in not finding the genuine 'leaf' hut that we expected, but this is quite rural enough to satisfy even the most poetical of travellers, and, moreover, possesses the additional novelty of being reached by a ladder, not of 'ropes,' but of bamboo. By way of being very attentive, our Lepchas have made a huge fire opposite to it. This small attention we would rather have dispensed with, in this melting locality; but it is, at any rate, suggestive of a refreshing cup of afternoon tea. One of the Lepchas is soon observed scaling the mountain to fetch milk, there existing a shepherd not far up, passing rich in possession of a cow; and he soon returns, bearing a quantity in a 'chonga,' which he cut for the purpose on his way thither.

We find our little habitation to be eight feet square, and raised on poles ten or twelve feet from the ground, whilst the flooring, being constructed wholly of rattan canes laid side by side, is so springy and elastic, that when standing on it, it is no easy matter to maintain one's

equilibrium, and, taken altogether, I do think it is the most amusing apology for a dwelling possible to conceive

Whilst F—— goes for a bath where the river is shallower, I venture on the bridge. Although flowing with its usual speed, the Teesta is deeper and less turbulent here, whilst the marvellous bridge spanning it, three hundred feet long, is composed solely of rattan cane, without the aid of a single nail or piece of rope from beginning to end

The canes of these bridges--for there are many others in these valleys—are taken from a species of *calamus*, an immense climber which roams the forest, and covers each tree, its gigantic tendrils frequently extending no less a distance than forty or fifty yards. The bridge has to be crossed singly, not only on account of its base being too narrow, to admit of two doing so abreast, but because it is considered unsafe to subject so fragile a structure to much weight. It is moreover so pliable and elastic, that a person standing at either end can make it toss up and down at will, the whole fabric vibrating and oscillating at each foot-fall. The appearance of this bridge is that of a delicate piece of net-work, and the sensations of the passenger are not only those of utter insecurity, as each fibre creaks and strains with his weight, but the sides being transparent, he feels as though he himself were being borne along at a tremendous speed, whilst the river beneath is stationary. It is undoubtedly a wonderful structure, and one that would

puzzle an English engineer to contrive ; and so striking an instance is it of the natural ingenuity and mechanical skill of the natives of the hills, that a fuller description of its construction may not be quite out of place here. I quote from Major J. S. Shirwell, R.E., who, from more technical knowledge, is better able than I am to describe it :—

‘ The main chains supporting the bridge are composed of five rattan canes each ; the sides are of split cane, hanging from either main chain as loops, two feet apart and two feet deep. Into these loops the platform is laid, composed of three bamboos the size of a man's arm, laid side by side ; the section of the bridge resembling the letter V, in the angle or base of which the traveller finds footing. . . . Outriggers, to prevent the main chains being brought together with the weight of the passenger, are placed at every ten or twelve feet, in the following manner :—Under the platform, and parallel to the stream, strong bamboos are passed, and from their extremities to the main chain (of cane) split rattan ropes are firmly tied. This prevents the hanging loop, or bridge, from shutting up and choking the passenger. The piers of these bridges are generally two convenient trees, through whose branches the main chains are passed, and pegged into the ground on the opposite side.’

I observe that the native police, several of whom are also stationed here—the bridge forming the connecting link between British territory and Bhootan—do not permit persons carrying heavy loads to cross it, and for

these a small bamboo raft is used, which looks if possible more fragile and dangerous still. The river is too rapid and the current too strong to be navigable, and I have been wondering how our troops managed when they marched into Bhootan, twelve or fourteen years ago. It must have occupied them a long time if they crossed it by the bridge. I forget now the cause of our skirmish in the neighbouring country, where so many of our brave fellows fell, not so much by sword as by disease. Some of them, reaching Bhootan before their tents and provisions, had to lie down on the saturated ground—for it was either during or immediately after the rainy season—and to subsist wholly on the food which they could obtain from the people of the thinly populated and hostile country through which they passed. F—— was under orders to join that expedition at one time, but his place was subsequently filled by one who, strange to say, died from the effects of this campaign. The bridge, if they crossed it, would have been the 'Bridge of Sighs' to very many, had they known their fate then. And I cannot help thinking of all this sorrowfully, as I stand upon it and watch the river flowing by.

But whilst I have been thus musing, F——, seated on the lowest step of the little ladder, has been smoking the pipe of peace, taking silent interest apparently in the cooking of the dinner, gipsy-like over the camp-fire, whence bubblings and frizzlings full of savoury promise reach me even at this distance, indicating com-

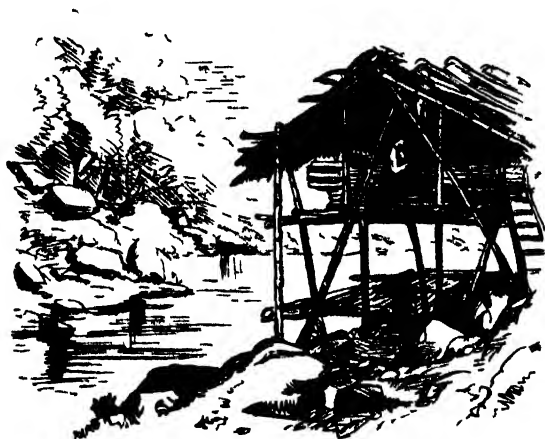
pletion at no remote period. In half an hour's time I bend my steps in the direction of our 'shanty,' and meet the kitmutgar, who as usual, *en grande tenue*, informs me with the state and dignity with which a well-bred Oriental always makes the important announcement, that —*kharā tiayar hai* (dinner is served).

Approaching the hut, I can already see F—— through the open cane-work, seated on the floor like a regular native, everything spread round him in convenient order. But no sooner have I ascended the ladder, and entered the aperture with an incautious bound, quite forgetting the elasticity of the floor, than each viand hops off its own dish on to that of something else, and all is dire confusion. The chicken which he was prepared to carve with the ceremony that befitted the occasion, takes refuge in the bread-plate, a bottle of claret empties its contents into his wide-awake, which he had thrown down beside him, whilst a shower of small missiles flies into the air. Nor is it easy to restore tranquillity, for no sooner is one erratic viand rescued, than another has flown off in a different direction. A game-pie—the supreme effort of our *chef*—on which we had set our longing hearts, had disappeared entirely, and with divers small comestibles was simply 'nowhere;' but the chinks in the floor affording a charming bird's-eye view of the sandy beach below, we can discern the salt spoon calmly reposing in a pool of claret in the hollow of a stone. The pie, however, and the other missing articles we do not discover till the close of the repast,

when they are dug out of a heap of baggage baskets in a corner, very cobwebby, and generally the 'worse for wear.'

Notwithstanding these discouragements, however, our dinner was anything but a fiction, and the exercise we had in capturing the fugitive dishes only gave additional zest to our appetites.

As we sit here, it is interesting to watch the natives cross the bridge, which they do at frequent intervals.



Some, blindfolding themselves first, *feel* their way across, lest the height and rushing water should make them giddy; and what singular Chinese-looking men they are, with their long pigtailed, and petticoats of amber, and crimson, and green; they look wonderfully like figures on an old-fashioned tea-tray, and are, I imagine, Chino-Thibetans.

Having started so early in the morning, we resolve to *retire* early, if that can be called retirement, where

everything but the stars can see us; and I am not sure that one of these even is not peeping through a hole in the thatch, for, be it known, our charming little abode is open on all sides but one. Vide illustration. The heat is exceedingly oppressive, however, so that perhaps after all it is a wise arrangement. On two sides of the hut bamboo shelves had been erected two feet from the ground, and as many broad, like berths in the cabins of a ship. On these our little camp mattresses are placed, and, simply throwing rugs around us, we recline upon them.

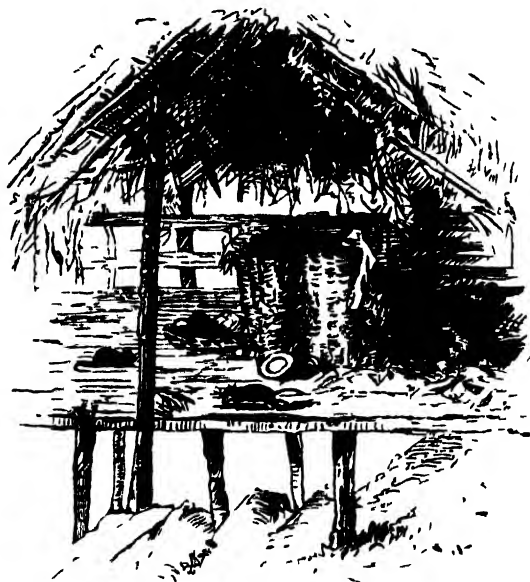
As soon as we extinguish the candle, which in true 'camp fashion' is standing in a bottle of departed 'Bass,' looking, from its limp and idiotic appearance, as though it had partaken considerably of that beverage itself, the sweet moonlight streams in upon us through the dried palm-leaves, which hang loosely over the roof of our little wigwam like a fringe, and which the wind softly stirring, rustles with a soft dreamy noise. Delightful is it to listen to the roar of the river, as it tumbles foaming over boulders in the distance, and to be lulled to sleep by its soothing ripple, as it laves the banks immediately below, the fragrant air sweeping over us the while.

Everything has a calming influence, half mesmeric, and I am just in that transition state between waking and sleeping, carrying thoughts of Longfellow's Evangeline and Hiawatha with me into dreamland—of which these surroundings forcibly remind me—when I am startled by

some large bird flying through the hut, making it vibrate with the flapping of its wings. After this I lie awake a long time, filled with an uncomfortable sensation lest it should return, and listening to a night-bird that has just begun its plaint, which uttering a continuous wailing cry, sounds particularly mournful amidst the general stillness. But its monotony at length lulls me into deep slumber, and it, with Evangeline and Hiawatha, and 'Minnehaha, laughing water,' is alike buried in the sweet oblivion of Lethe, when I am again aroused by numerous bats, flying backwards and forwards, and beating themselves blindly against the sides of the hut. I am just beginning to put up with them as part of the programme when, ugh! two, swooping down, actually fan my cheeks with their wings. This is more than I *can* bear, and I subside beneath my rug.

Slumber henceforth is out of the question, for besides all this, every now and again, native travellers pass close by to cross the bridge, making stealthy and suggestive noises on the elastic cane-work with their naked feet; and I cannot help thinking that it *might* have been as well, 'had there been some kind of door, or enclosure, to the entrance of the hut. Moreover, the existence of the ladder fills me with vague apprehensions, and a sensation familiarly known as the 'creeps.' At these moments I can fully appreciate and sympathise with Robinson Crusoe's motive in dragging *his* up after him, but ours happens unfortunately to be a fixture.

Then as night wears on—as though the visitants, real and imaginary, which I have already enumerated, were not enough—water rats come scrambling up the poles, and get not only into the hut, but make a violent raid into the provision baskets, where I plainly hear them scratching and nibbling the paper in their attempts to get at



the stores, failing in which, I am in an agony lest, in a fit of disappointment and rage, they should take to our toes.

Not liking to awaken F——, I whisper a soft 'Shish! shish!' at which they scamper off as fast as they can go; but presently I hear the 'patter, patter, patter' of their little feet on the cane floor, and know they only retired

with precipitation, to return again as soon as all was quiet. Finally, alighting amongst a lot of plates, they do at last startle and arouse him, and then what a scuttling there is, when, regardless of consequences to the cups and saucers, he hurls his boot at them; and how they rush about, becoming so hopelessly frightened that they cannot find exit; one big fellow springing upon a baggage basket, where it gets so paralysed with terror, that it remains there without moving, and looks so horridly human in its distress, that I quite feel for it; but F—— gives it with his remaining boot a knock that sends it flying backwards through the hut, whence it falls on the stones below with a 'thud' that I suspect settles its destiny for ever.

Close to the place where my head reposes, but outside the hut, is a nest of mice, from the tiny cadence that reaches my ear perpetually. They are evidently engaged in very animated conversation, our invasion being probably the subject of it; and I long for daylight to have a peep at these interesting little pilgrims of the night.



CHAPTER XII.

NOONTIDE IN THE TROPICS.

AT length dawn arrived, as it always will 'if you wait for it,' as that astute philosopher Whyte Melville tells us, and whilst F—— still slumbers, I rise, glad to make any change after the tedium of the weary night. The first thing I do is to search in the direction of my supposed little family of mice, when I discover that they are in truth not mice but *bats*, which have made themselves a snug eyrie beneath the thatch. They are all young and not yet able to fly, but they flutter their clawed wings painfully as I gaze at them. They would appear to have been deserted by their parents, who are probably frightened away by our unexpected advent. I watch them for a long time, studying the social and domestic habits of these little mammiferous creatures, and by the time we leave this 'happy valley' I shall no doubt be able to add considerably to the science of natural history!

Descending the ladder, I stroll down to the river's banks. The ripples, fanned by the faint morning breeze, roll over the glittering beach, and gently lap the snow-white stones on its margin. A silvery mist hangs over the valley, concealing the mountain tops, but is slowly

rising, and as it does so, it gets held in detached fragments by the branches of trees that cover the steeps. As we ascend higher and higher, what exquisite bits of soft hazy distance are opened out to view, where the winding river loses itself behind blue mountains! The air is filled with fragrance, and dew-drops hang from every leaf and spray, whilst tender lights, glinting here and there through the white pall of vapour, flash and quiver on the tremulous water. A party of natives is already being pulled across on the little raft I have before mentioned, carrying quaint-looking loads on their backs. I watch it weather the rapids in mid-stream, and reach the opposite shore some distance down the river, for the impetuous current bears the raft along with it, and it is impossible to cross in a direct line. The little band of travellers, bound for Thibet, I imagine—for one soon learns to distinguish each tribe by its costume—toils up the steep zig-zag path: now I see them, now lose them again, as they get hidden behind trees; then higher, where the forest ceases, I watch them climbing like a 'string of many-coloured spiders,' till they are lost at last in the shadowy distance. Close to the place where I am standing, a bear and two leopard skins are spread out to dry, a fact very suggestive of the *living* presence of these creatures in the jungle around us. They appear to have been shot recently, and no doubt were killed by the chowkeydars a day or two ago, all of whom, I see, possess fire-arms.

An hour later I have the satisfaction of seeing our

breakfast cooked over the camp-fire, consisting of an omelette, and the chicken of our dinner 'of discontent made glorious' in a *réchauffé* of some sort. Not a little amusing is it to see the heterogeneous collection of articles pertaining to the mystery of his art, from a refrigerator to a toasting-fork, which our cook has thought proper to bring with him, to meet all the exigencies of the journey. We did not think it necessary to bring his assistant with us; but, as he appears to think himself too dignified an artist to condescend to the menial part of the preparations, three Lepchas, crouching round the fire, looking very amiable, but inexpressibly dirty, as I am sorry to say they always are, officiate under his direction. Summoning up courage, I remonstrate fiercely at these proceedings, in the most commanding Hindustani I can muster on so short a notice, but failing to make myself intelligible I give it up in despair, and have no doubt whatever that on the occasion of the breakfast—the result of their united efforts—we get through a large portion of that element, of which each person is said to have a 'peck' allotted to him in the course of his existence. Be this as it may, we did ample justice to the repast, and found no cause to complain of the flavour of the *menu*, which we thought was unusually savoury, whilst everything about us formed such a contrast to our every-day experience, that things which would be esteemed as hardships ill to be borne elsewhere, were here but a new delight.

We had just completed our repast, when an officer from Darjeeling came riding up, with a guard of armed Goorkhas, on his way to Bhootan, to endeavour to discover the perpetrators of the murder of a British subject, which has recently taken place there. He gladly joined us at our repast, after which we watched him and his guard cross the bridge one at a time, the ponies being made to swim the river, whilst three men standing at the opposite side, pulled them over with rattan ropes.

And now we sally forth ourselves, F—— shouldering his gun, and I his butterfly-net, and we wander back to the junction of these two great rivers. Just here the gorge widens, and the mountains are less precipitous, but all are densely clothed with vegetation to their very summits. How wonderfully ethereal all looks in the pure morning light! the delicate pinkish white of the sand, as well as of the rocks and boulders, which reflect themselves in the water, and cast pearly shadows on the shore, combining to create an effect quite opalesque, and one that is indescribably refined and beautiful.

The fog has disappeared entirely by this time, but there is a soft thin haze hovering over everything that lends sweet mystery to the scene. Here we halt, and I essay to make a sketch, whilst F——, stretched at full length by my side, smokes the calming weed, and occasionally reads aloud. But all is not as peaceful as might be wished, even in this heavenly spot, for he soon finds that he has all along been reclining upon an ant-hill, and the

little, or rather *big* creatures here—for they are fully half an inch long—are hurrying about in all directions, each with an egg in its mouth almost as large as itself, stopping now and then to have a word or two with a neighbour on the signs of the times; and then gathering up their eggs, they scamper off again as hard as they can go. Peepsas too, an almost invisible black insect, sit upon our eyelids, and raise pustules wherever they attack, causing great irritation. Bees, attracted by the sweetness of my moist colour-pans, get caught in these miniature bogs, where they make a woeful buzzing, and then leave their legs behind; whilst flies, which later in the day insist on having an undue share of our lunch, walk serenely over my mountains, and make blotches in my sky.

But all these together are, to my mind, as nothing to a sketcher's oft experience in England, where, sitting silently at your easel in a field or country lane, you are suddenly startled by a hot moist blast behind you, and, looking over your shoulder, behold an erratic cow, which having watched you intently over a hedge for a long time—cows always are such inquisitive creatures—breaks through it in a vulnerable part, and then determining to have a nearer view, wanders up to see what it is all about, followed slowly by the whole herd, each as it passes blowing on your sketch, threatening to overturn your easel, and keeping you in mortal terror all the while.

The ingenious Lepchas, however, who accompanied us to carry my sketching apparatus, rising to the occa-

sion, cut down branches and fan us with them, to keep off the little pests I have before mentioned ; and as the sun ascends above the summit of the gorge, they lop more branches, and with their useful 'bans,' ever at their sides, form an arbour for us where we sit, sheltering us completely. Then I send them off and away, into the distance, with instructions to sit upon the white trunk of a tree, which has become stranded on a bit of sandy beach yonder, where they come in very prettily in my sketch.

This done, we clamber up the mountain, through tangled brushwood, veiled with creeping ferns and a soft network of loveliest green ; our ponies scrambling after us with much ado, dislodging pieces of rock and loose earth, and hurling the débris upon the luckless heads of those who happen to be in the rear. Then F—— goes roaming with his net amidst the trees in quest of butterflies and insects ; and tired by my climb, and wishing to rest awhile, I recline in a shady nook, and watch the ponies, dainty things ! grazing, or pretending to graze, off golden ferns, a few paces from me.

Looking upwards, attracted by the jubilation of happy birds, I observe that each branch and stem of the tall forest trees is deeply fringed with hanging moss, the appearance of which is very singular, but exceedingly lovely withal. And now the sun, rising higher and higher, finds its way through thin places in the foliage, and obliges me to seek for deeper shade, for the heat grows oppressive : the birds cease to carol amongst the branches,

and the insects to hum ; the breeze falls to sleep ; the leaves whisper together no longer, and noon soon folds all Nature to slumber on her warm breast.

Those who have witnessed noontide slumber only in our own land can but faintly realise the strange stillness and great universal 'siesta' of the Tropics, where at other times throughout the day the air is filled with bird and insect life. No sound is heard but the distant roar of the river, and now and again that of a little bird making a soft dreamy twitter, as it tucks its head more tightly under its wing, or a gentle rustle in the dry grass caused by a lizard peeping out of its hole, perhaps to see what time it is, and then going in to sleep again. The lizards in these valleys are not green, but gold and bronze—metallic-looking little fellows, with coats of brightest mail. Another faint rustle, and a small grey squirrel, with its brush striped with black, darts up the tree close beside me ; and then all is still, till an hour later, when a footstep approaches, and F——'s cheery voice awakes me from my reverie : he returns, after securing one or two valuable additions to his entomological collection ; but the poor little captives fluttering about in the cruel net are a sight I never like to see.

And now, repairing once more to the banks of the river where the shade is thickest, we sit and listen to the music of its roar. Presently, a short distance up, on the opposite side, a deer emerges from the jungle and swims across—a 'barking deer' I imagine from its size, with

which these forests abound, so called on account of its uttering a short shrill bark, slightly resembling that of a dog; and when shadows begin to lengthen, we saunter back again to our shanty, ankle deep in sand, the pinkish colour of which is said to arise from the presence of minute atoms of garnet, of which much is found in the rocks.

On our way we met, and were addressed by, a good-looking young Lepcha, carrying a net upon his shoulder, who described himself as a butterfly-catcher. Would the sahib engage him for the time he was in the valley? he might remunerate him as he pleased, and he would capture as many as possible for him. There was something so soft and pleasant in his manner, and he seemed so anxious to be employed, that F—— engaged him at once, and told him he might join our encampment as soon as he chose.

By the time we reached the bridge, both it and the river were shrouded in gloom, but the sinking sun was gilding the mountain tops with burnished splendour. How beautiful it was to see the blue shadow, like a thing of life, slowly ascend the gorge, inch by inch, as the sun sank deeper and deeper below the hills, sending upwards a gush of roseate and golden light! We watch the rainbow tints to westward die out one by one, and then the moon glides up behind the tree-clad summit of the mountain, and pale stars peep forth from the purpling sky, their brightness alone dimmed by the lustre of the greater light.

There is, as all know, very little twilight in these latitudes. As the sun sets, all signs of day quickly fade, and the moon on rising shines with a brilliancy and glory impossible to be imagined by those who have only seen it in our more northern hemisphere. After our rustic repast, which on this occasion we partake of *al-fresco*, we cross the bridge, and stand for the first time in Bhootan, and looking down upon the river, upon which the moon shines like a path of silver, we think we have never seen anything so lovely as the scene. The woods on either side are thrown into the very blackest shade, the jagged outlines of the mountains standing out sharp and clear. Half-way up our Lepchas' little encampment is situated, and their fire burning brightly gleams like a beacon-light. Below, close to the water's edge, as if placed there to enhance the beauty of the scene, is a picturesque hut. Some natives inside have lighted a fire, which, sending up a lurid smoke, contrasts curiously with the cold moonlight; whilst the glare of the fire reflecting itself in the river, and the natives' dusky figures against it, throwing grotesque shadows, produce a wonderfully Rembrandt-like effect, and the whole forms a picture so exquisite, that even Turner, in his most extravagant moods, could scarcely have idealised it.

We sit long in the balmy air, drinking in its evening freshness as it comes wafted towards us along the valley; whilst the moon, which looks down upon us with her tranquil placid face, rides majestically in the star-

bespangled heavens. All is peaceful, and a feeling of intense tranquillity and happiness steals over us, in harmony with the surrounding scene, and the perfect solitude and absence of the din of tumultuous life. We seem cut off alike from past and future, poised as it were in some intermediate present, that bears no part in our real lives ; and wishing I could but hold it fast, I pause, and wonder whether, as it passes, I suck out all its honied sweetness.

But already deep schemes and dark designs are being laid for a railway from the plains to this lovely valley. O ye shades primeval! *figurez-vous* a troop of English engineers invading thy fastnesses, and the shrill practical whistle of a locomotive resounding through thy solitudes, which may heaven beneficent forfend !

By this time the swarthy natives in the little hut below, having cooked and eaten their evening meal, are fast asleep, their recumbent forms just visible in the flickering firelight ; whilst the crackling of the wood as it slowly burns away, the soft lap-lap of the water as it gently laves the banks beside us, and its more distant roar, are the only sounds that break the stillness, and make it live, except now and then the melancholy chaunt of a Lepcha, proceeding from their encampment above, abrupt, fragmentary, and always in the minor key. But a little later, this, too gradually subsides, as wakefulness gives place to slumber, and the night-bird once more begins its plaint.

Then, before retiring ourselves, we improvise a door

to our habitation. During the day, branches had been thickly interlaced to cover the apertures on all sides, in the hope of excluding our visitors of the previous night. Besides this, the Lepchas with ruthless hand had routed out my little family of bats, for on my return this evening, I descried the lifeless bodies of the slain lying on the sands below, which had all the appearance of a miniature battle-field.

There would consequently seem to be a probability of our obtaining a better night's rest, and I lie down with something like a feeling of security, listening, however—for who could help it?—to a native in the distance, who, provoking wretch! having had his own first sleep, now turns night into day as the manner of these people is, and, musically inclined, begins playing a rather lively air on a little pipe or flute, which these hill people rudely manufacture from the small bamboo cane.

From the direction of the sound, I imagine it must proceed from the amiable shepherd who supplies us with milk, and who is perhaps serenading us from his sylvan retreat, as Pan of old might have done. I fall asleep at length, and dream that that god of herdsmen, horns and hoofs, in orthodox array, is sitting on the ladder, while he endeavours to enchant Selene, goddess of night, with the music of his reeds. So near sounds the pastoral melody in my sleep, that either it or my dream awakes me; but all is still, and I hope devoutly that our shepherd's pipe is put out for the remainder of the night.

Sleep, however, except of the most disturbed and intermittent kind is out of the question, for, in spite of our precautions, water-rats invade us in as great numbers as before, finding their way through the interstices of the floor, which it did not occur to us to stop up. We therefore pass another very warlike night in hurling at them all the missiles on which we can lay our hands, but do not succeed in routing the enemy, who reinforce themselves perpetually. At last, worn out by our exertions, we surrender, and rolling ourselves up in our respective rugs, make a strong mental resolve that it shall be our last night's acceptance of the inhospitable shelter of this little roof-tree, and that we will make other arrangements for the morrow.



CHAPTER XIII.

WE CHANGE OUR QUARTERS.

OUR people's encampment was situated about 300 feet up the mountain, where overhanging rocks formed their only shelter. Thither F—— hied at peep of day, whilst the remembrance of the night's miseries was still fresh upon him. It was a stiff climb for a lowlander to accomplish ; but once there, having chosen a spot that appeared suitable for the purpose, he ordered a leaf-hut to be made without delay. Having their materials everywhere around them, all were soon engaged in lopping branches and preparing stout bamboo stakes for poles, the trunks of two trees answering the purpose for the back of the hut, against which smaller bamboos, placed horizontally, were tied together with the tendrils of climbers, which hung from each tree in long serpent-like coils. Between all, boughs were tightly interlaced ; and in little more than two hours' time, a habitation, about as comfortable and snug as one could desire in these latitudes, was not only built, but furnished with little benches and tables made of bamboo, split into pieces, till it had quite the appearance of a permanent abode.

The many uses to which this tree is applied by the natives of India, forcibly remind me of the cacao-nut palm of Ceylon. 'Man wants but little here below ;' and a happy pair of Cingalese have only to 'squat' under half-a-dozen cacao-nut trees, to find all their wants supplied. Its fruit forms their meat and drink ; its leaves roof their hut , from its fibre they weave a fabric which clothes them ; the shells of the fruit form both their drinking and cooking utensils ; from the bark of the tree, sewn together, they construct little boats, in which they paddle about the swamps, and snare wild-fowl. And so with the bamboo. The Lepchas can almost subsist on the young shoots, which they stew in one of its own tubes : it forms, in some shape or other, their entire abode. By rubbing two pieces of it sharply together, they produce fire ; paper is made from the leaves and sheaths, after they have been steeped in water and reduced to a pulp ; from the canes, split into thin strips, baskets of various kinds are made, and a hundred other things ; there being scarcely anything for which it is not used. '

Our ~~leaf~~-hut proves not only more comfortable, but even more picturesque than the little one we have deserted, on the roof of which we look down, whilst our present view is far more extended, and everything around is passing lovely calm, tranquil, and serene. Some little distance along the side of the mountain, whither I soon wandered, a view of the Junction could be obtained ;

and it was curious at this distance to observe the line of demarcation between the waters of the Rungheet and those of the Teesta, the one so transparent and green, the other so milky white. Very wonderful to look down upon was the meeting of these two great rivers, which tear along in different directions, and then join in one. How the ancient Hindoos would have fabled them in their mythology!

Here I decide to take up my position for the day and sketch, whilst F——, who is suffering acutely from lepidoptera on the brain,—accompanied by the butterfly Lepcha. starts immediately after breakfast, armed with his net for a long roam through the Teesta valley. The air is cooler here, and insect life consequently less abundant; but the flowers, on the contrary, are increased tenfold in number and beauty, many of the climbers and orchids being in full bloom. One of the former hangs in large clusters of snowy whiteness above my head, with thick cup-shaped, wax-like petals, filled with luscious perfume, together with another of the *leguminous* order, not unlike the Wisteria in form, but of richest crimson, hanging a foot and a half in length. Bees are abundant, although peepsas and insects of the smaller kind are absent; but finding more honey than they did in the valley, they do not so determinedly invade my moist colour-pans in search of sweetness, and having over-eaten themselves long before noon, lie dozing in the flower chalices, where they keep up a sub-

dued but contented brm, brm, brm, as though they were snoring. Dragon-flies occasionally play at hide and seek, but do not trouble me, with the exception of one intrusive fellow, that flits about my block ; but I smite him on the head with the handle of my brush, at which he gets him away right humbly. There was, indeed, such a gush of loveliness around me all the day, that I felt I could sit and breathe my very life away, it all seemed so heavenly.

What a beautiful world is ours ! Who would think—not knowing—that it is so hard and sad a one, for some to *live* in. Ay, hard and sad. A world where there are rocks ahead, and unseen reefs, and adverse winds and tides, and stormy breakers, all too mighty for the frail little crafts that are sometimes launched upon its tempestuous ocean, and ‘whose waters of deep woe are often brackish with the salt of human tears.’ Cannot one read it in the countenances of two out of every six persons one meets, where the whole is written in deep lines as in a chart ? There are the ‘tackings’ to and fro, the adverse winds and tides, those days of doubt, despondency and gloom, when they could take no bearings ; for their sun was dimmed in heaven, the moon gave no light, and the very stars refused to shine—those ‘fourteen nights’ of agonising suspense, when they ‘cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day ;’—those stormy weeks when the little vessel was driven up and down before the wind, under double-reefed topsails ;

those days when, with rudder tied, she was 'hove to' in a gale; that awful moment when she grazed a rock, which did not wreck her quite, but stunned and struck her backwards with such crushing force, that each plank quaked and trembled from stem to stern, followed by that ominous pause—that lull, worse than the shock itself, ere she rose once more, and went bounding over the billows. There are the days, too, when the breakers heaved so high, that they broke over her decks, threatening each moment to swamp and bury her in the deep; and there is that one great cruel wave which swept all before it, and did well-nigh engulph her, carrying with it her 'tackling'—the little nothings, 'trifles light as air,' round which some sweet remembrance clung, it may be, of days now long ago, that pet thing, that idol, dearer far than life itself—all, all torn from it, washed away, leaving it a sullen, gloomy-looking hull, to float on with bare poles for evermore. Then that hurricane, when she became almost a wreck, and was 'picked up,' rescued, towed in by another vessel passing by—saved by the outstretched hand of a friend, or by a Mightier than human hand; for an Unseen Guardian was standing at the prow, leading it through waves of sorrow into that haven where it 'would be,' gathering it into that anchorage, both sure and steadfast, where there will be no more tossings to and fro, for 'the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.' Oh! never do I see a dear old weather-beaten, wrinkled, time-worn face,

but I think it is man's own log-book, of which he himself holds the key.

And sitting here busily sketching, I was led to ponder much on the manner in which things animate take their tone from external nature, and of the great universal harmony which exists in every thing, and how different, for instance, is the merry chirp of the feathered tribe, flitting about in the sunshine, to the dolorous plaint of the night-bird. Then the dreamy hours of noon-tide falling, I, too, subsided at last into what F—— calls one of my 'brown studies,' whilom thinking of Lattoo, whilom of nothing at all, when that little angel's wings suddenly appeared before me.

'Why, Lattoo!' I exclaimed, 'where have you sprung from, and why in the world did you come all this way to see me?' For she looked hot, and tired, and dishevelled and out of breath, and must, I imagined, have walked at least twenty miles to find me.

'Not far, mem sahib, not far,' she replied; 'me come down by that mountain, and through that *watter thar*.'

And then, on her recalling it to my remembrance, I recollected having passed a broad stream on our way to the Teesta junction, the day we arrived, which no doubt was the Rungnoo; and she had probably only walked a few miles, these mountains and valleys being very puzzling to those who are ignorant of their windings.

She had been over into Sikkim, to her mother's sister, she told me, and on her return last night, seeing Atchoo,

who had been to Darjeeling, and heard where we were, had decided to come down at once, not only to see me, but to supplicate to be taken into my service as ayah, for the purpose of accompanying me on our long journey to the 'interior.' In explanation of her sudden disappearance, she confided to me the fact that there had been a great *tumasha* (row) at her home. One night the bears had come down and eaten the young ears of Indian corn, and otherwise injured the crops; and Atchoo happening to be 'loafing' about, at an inopportune moment, the old man, unusually irritated, had kicked him off the premises, calling him opprobrious names, an indignity Lattoo resented on his account, and father and daughter came to high words, upon which she determined to leave home for good; but relenting—for this singular girl could be as ferocious as a young tigress at one time, and as gentle as a gazelle at another—she returned, all sorrow and repentance, on the eighth day of absence.

'How soon are you going to marry, Lattoo?' I enquired, still going on with my sketch.

'Marry, mem sahib, marry! How can me marry?'

'Well, you are surely engaged, or betrothed, or whatever you call it in your language. Atchoo thinks you will marry him some day. You would not deceive him; he loves you, Lattoo.'

'Yes, he loves me; poor Atchoo!' she rejoined, pensively.

'And do not you love him too?'

‘Yes, mem sahib, *sometink*, but my *fadder* he kill me, if I marry a Lepcha man.’

This, doubtless, was conclusive, and I said no more about the matter. She assured me, however, that her father had given her permission to ask me to engage her as my ayah ; but fond as I was of her, I must say I had very strong misgivings as to whether she would make a good servant. Moreover, I did not intend to take a maid with me, although I anticipated great inconvenience in the absence of one. I believed I had no right to subject another woman to the hardships of road and climate to which I had voluntarily committed myself ; and to do so would necessitate considerable additional expense, involving an extra tent, as well as obliging us to furnish her with some mode of conveyance. But here was one who proposed taking all the risk of the journey upon herself. She was able to encounter the difficulties of the way, and my responsibility was at an end. I had not *asked* her to come ; it was her own proposition. As I looked at her, a bright gleam of sunshine, glinting through the leaves, played upon her head, and lingered there as though it loved it. How pretty she was, and what deep rich colouring there was about her ; she might have been a model for a Madonna di Raffaello. She possessed, too, one of those charming little faces that the French call *mobile*, one that can be all smiles and dimples and blushes and tears in an instant. How often I could paint her when I had her all to myself

in my tent. It was a great temptation, and she begged so earnestly to be allowed to accompany me, that I said, 'Well, Lattoo, I will, at any rate, consult the sahib about it.'

But I did not expect the sahib back till the shades of evening would be closing over us, for he had taken a 'nose-bag' with him, filled with creature comforts, and I was not to look for him, he told me, till dinner-time; and, once started, he would wander far, I knew. So telling her that she might return to-morrow, and remain with me as long as we were here, I ordered my pony to be saddled, and the blue line beginning to creep up the mountain, I rode back with her, along the banks of the Teesta and Rungheet, till we reached a narrow gorge, through which a shallow stream trickled and emptied itself into the great river; when, taking off her gay-coloured mocassins, she stepped at once into the middle of the stream, the banks being too rocky to admit of her doing otherwise, and went her way.

Reining in my pony, I stood watching the *svelte* and graceful little figure tripping over the stones, and listening to the splash of her footfall, as she waded through the water, till she disappeared behind a bold rock at the head of the gorge, whither the river winding got lost to view. Long before reaching the bridge on my homeward way, I heard F——'s voice echoing along the Teesta valley, shouting to announce his speedy return.

The next morning Lattoo presented herself, her face all radiant with smiles, and figure brilliant in a dress of

red, blue, and orange. F——, to whom I had confided my invitation to her, ordered our men forthwith to make a little leaf-hut for her, near to our own, which, by the way, proved a complete success. Nothing came to disturb our slumbers, and, as the bulletin say, we 'passed a calm and tranquil night.'

The time sped only too swiftly, each day bringing its pleasant incident. Sometimes we made long excursions up or down the valley in quest of ferns for pressing, and orchids for hanging in the verandah of our mountain home. The best plan to obtain the latter is to peel away the bark of the tree to which they are attached, when they will bloom each year as in their natural habitat, requiring no water or any attention whatever, but solely to be allowed to breathe the air of heaven, and only coveting to be loved and admired as all fair things do. Sometimes F—— accompanied me on these expeditions, sometimes Lattoo and I went alone, occasionally crossing the Rungheet bridge—a much smaller one than that of the Teesta, but also a marvel of cane-work and engineering skill. Beyond this the mountain slope for some distance is clothed with tall pines, resembling the Scotch fir, and it is singular to observe anything so like the vegetation of our own isles growing in combination with that of the tropics: but it is here only, I believe, in all these valleys that they are seen.

'Mem sahib!' exclaimed one of my attendant Lepchas one day, as I sat making a sketch, with Lattoo by

my side—'how many rupees will you get for that *taswir* ?'

'Nothing,' I replied. 'I paint because it pleases me.'

'What!' he rejoined, with a look in which both astonishment and pity were mingled—'nothing! I thought it was your *bickree*' (trade).

They are such a thoroughly indolent people themselves, that they find it difficult to realise any one's working for mere pleasure or amusement. And this remark reminded me of that of a Rajah, who, being present at a ball, at a period when English customs were not so well known in India as they are now, exclaimed, on seeing English ladies dance for the first time, 'Can it be possible that these are *ladies* dancing? I thought they were *nautch-girls*. We always hire people to dance for us.'

In some places the Lepchas are burning portions of the forest to clear the land for cultivation; and at night it was a wondrous and awful sight to see the flame stalking along like a hungry and insatiable demon, destroying all it touched, and with its eager tongue lapping up the goodly trees—the bamboos, being hollow, yielding to the force of the fierce element with loud explosions like that of cannon, from the expansion of confined air; and the burning of one of these spreading clumps, often more than twenty feet in height, reminded me of the final burst of rockets at a pyrotechnic display, whilst the noise was perfectly deafening.

At night too, we often watch our people set bamboo

traps for fish, which generally forms our breakfast the following morning. Various kinds are found in these rivers, one of which, the maha-seer, is exceedingly nice : and there is also another, the flavour of which is not unlike trout. The Lepchas invariably cook their fish in the hollow of a bamboo, which they plunge into hot wood ashes, where it is allowed to seethe till tender.

The pathway along the margin of the river Teesta being the high road to Bhootan, between which and Bengal a considerable trade is carried on, we frequently make friends with the parties of wayfarers bivouacking here, and induce them to show us their wares, sometimes making extensive purchases, F——, amongst other things, collecting yâk tails, one of their articles of commerce. Of these tails a kind of brush is made, often mounted in silver, and much used in riding, for the purpose of switching off flies. They are very long, covered with rich glossy wool almost like silk, and are of three colours, black, white, and grey. At no hour of the day can one walk very far in this valley without lighting on a number of travellers, their picturesque packs lying beside them ; one party alone consisting frequently of as many as ten or fifteen men. Choosing a shady place a little distance from the main pathway, and collecting together a heap of large stones, they construct a rude fire-place, in the centre of which they pile wood, and then proceed to cook their food in a large earthen pot, generally consisting of rice mixed with '*ghee*.' They also make a

tough cake with the flour of Indian corn, and bake it in the cinders; and after the meal, each man may be seen with his iron pipe silently smoking. Their looks belie them, for they are a wonderfully peaceful and quiet people, in spite of their formidable appearance, some of them attaining a height of more than six feet, all broad-chested and muscular, with Tartar features, the eye small with long pointed corners, whilst long knives hang from their belts. They always seem pleased, too, when we stop and address them, not one in return for our intru-



sion in their midst giving us even a surly glance. But our conversation with them is not carried on in a particularly lively manner, the Bhootia language being a dialect of Thibetan, more or less blended with words and

idioms of the countries on which it borders. Bhootan itself is an extensive region of Northern Hindustan, lying between Bengal and Thibet, separated from the latter country by the Himalaya, and forming the southern portion of the declivity of that stupendous Alpine chain, of which Thibet forms the table-land, touching Assam on the east, and called by the Hindoos, *Bhote*.

The principal manufacture of the country is paper, made from the bark of a tree, the *Daphne papyrifera*, from which a kind of satin is also made, much worn by the Chinese. Coarse woollen and linen cloths are also manufactured there, the chief articles of export being ivory, musk, rock salt, tobacco, gold dust, and silver ingots. The trade, however, is a monopoly in the hands of the government, the Deb Rajah sending companies of men laden with these articles every year to the Bengal Presidency.

In addition to their heavy loads, each man carries on a little light, and I suspect contraband, trading on his own account, his pouch formed by the loose robe above the girdle being full of small objects of merchandise—idols, pieces of ivory, barbs for arrows, musk, assafœtida, spices, tobacco, opium, dried fruit; a pair of forceps, a wooden comb, and other toilet arrangements, occasionally even gunpowder. As they pull one thing after another out of their pockets, they often laugh heartily over the heterogeneous collection spread before us. Sometimes

they carry Thibetan puppies for sale ; little fat round balls covered with long fluffy wool ; flat-faced like the people, and with eyes keen and deep-set. But F—— is more interested in their weapons than in aught else. These vary in shape, and are frequently enclosed in very beautiful scabbards ; their knives, in most instances, being short and curved. To each of these is attached a steel for striking light, a needle-case, a smaller knife, and pair of forceps, every one of these articles having its own little leather case. They also carry arrows, the barbs of which are dipped in a poison taken from a tree unknown to Europeans, and about which they are very reticent, never divulging its name under any circumstances. These arrows, together with their knives and falchions, form their only weapons in war. Having spent nearly a week in this 'happy valley,' we start on the morrow for a short trip into their country.

CHAPTER XIV.

WE CROSS OVER INTO BHOOTAN, AND TAKE A LITTLE HEALTHFUL EXERCISE.

VERY fair broke the morn. Lo! eastward the sun, just rising above the mountain tops, began, like a magician's wand, to irradiate all nature with hues of gold and azure. Rapidly the line of shadow crept down the mountain slopes, till sky, and forest, and tremulous water were bathed in its effulgence, and all the valley wore a smile.

After a hasty breakfast, singly and severally we crossed the bridge, and found mules awaiting us, which were ordered some days ago from a place in Bhootan. Most astounding and overwhelming animals they were, their accoutrements so massive that they might, and possibly *did*, originally belong to Budh himself, the saddle alone taking one back to primeval time, the mules themselves nearly bald, and their tails bereft of hair except at the extreme tip, where a little shaggy tuft—a relic of past glory—still lingered.

It was some time before we could attempt to mount them, so convulsed with laughter were we over the sight of the tatterdemalion and quaintly caparisoned quadrupeds

which were waiting to convey us; and when at last we were in our saddles, we nearly fell off again from the same cause. At length, having recovered our composure, we commenced the ascent of the gorge; and I only wish our friends at home could have witnessed our grotesque cavalcade. Before us walked our muleteers, behind followed a native, also on mule-back, carrying a rusty match-lock, the first thing in all probability ever made in the shape of fire-arms. In the matter of dress, however, he was quite resplendent, and looked a compromise between a Fire-worshipper of old and an Effendi of the 'Arabian Nights,' for he wore an imposing turban of blue and gold, wound round a conical cap of faded red, with large heavy flaps covering the ears, and a blue cloth coat, whilst a scarlet 'cummerbund' encircled the waist.

A zig-zag path had been worn away in the hard dry soil by travellers climbing with heavy loads, and this path we, as well as the Lepchas, who were laden with stores, followed; but the rest of our party, scrambling up the almost perpendicular face of the mountain, were already far above us. It was a frightful climb truly for man and beast, but what superb and glorious views we obtained of mountain and river as we gradually ascended!

All rivers are said to 'wind like a silver thread.' I wish I could say that mine did not. I wish I could say that the Teesta shot like a silver arrow, or wound like a green ribbon, or foamed like a mighty torrent—anything

but the conventional simile, but I cannot : there it is beneath me, flowing along like the veritable silver thread, with this exception, that it did not merely *wind*, I am thankful to say it did more, it meandered ; whilst the bridge and our little homestead, distanced into microscopic dimensions, looked like Swiss toys. As we ascended higher, parasites festooning each branch in rich garlands enclosed wondrous pictures of blue mountain and crystal peak in a natural framework of leaves ; and after a hard climb of several thousand feet, occupying seven hours, we breathed a purer and more bracing atmosphere, and reached Kalimpoong.

Here we find a very capacious and clean hut, of a more substantial description, erected some months ago for that most excellent of men, Major M——, Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling, who was then travelling in this district. Our servants and party of Lepchas have this time not only arrived, but have made two large camp-fires in readiness for us—a cheering sight, for the air is keen and nipping after the heat of the valley. There is an abundance of dry wood lying about in the neighbouring forest, and dragging along huge logs, they heap one upon another till they reach several feet in height, and look like funereal pyres.

Not only Lattoo and our servants, but even the poor heavily laden Lepchas also, gathered every new flower and fern they met with on their way hither, and spread them out before us on our arrival, till we found ourselves

surrounded by a carpet of flowers. They have also adorned themselves with them, having one stuck in each ear, the flower they most favour being that of the Lotus-tree. But F—— does not find the 'butterfly Lepcha' as energetic as he might be in the practice of his art. He has found no new specimens for two days, but seems rather to spend his time in talking to Lattoo; and one would suppose that this individual imagined that Lepidoptera were only to be found in her immediate neighbourhood, so closely does he follow her about.

In the course of an hour we are engaged in the consumption of a very prosaic and substantial dinner; and



I think it would astonish the great Soyer himself, to see the repast these native cooks can serve when camping out. What 'savoury messes,' delicious curries, soups, and appetising stews! A few round holes made in the ground, filled with charcoal,

and there is scarcely anything they cannot produce.

Half a mile further on is a small guard-post, some four or five native police being stationed there. With this exception, the vast wild with which we are sur-

rounded is wholly unpeopled. Not a sound is heard as we sit by our camp-fire in the solemn stillness, feeling absolutely alone in the great heart of Nature, for our poor tired folk are recumbent and fast asleep, round their own fire, fifty yards off. Beneath our feet lies the valley of the Teesta, from which a ghostly streak of vapour is rising, gathering up into soft cumuli as it slowly ascends, and obscuring the outlines of the nearer mountains.

From this elevation we again catch sight of the Snowy Range, though only of the loftiest peaks in Thibet, Kinchinjunga, as well as the whole of the Sikkim Himalaya, being hidden by the forest-clad mountains to our left; but these we hope to see again to-morrow from a totally different aspect, and from a much higher point than Darjeeling.

It is a sweet starry evening, and the vast mountains, which, as the song says, are 'so near and yet so far,' are veiled in a soft transparent mist. Not a breath stirs the forest, for the breeze died away hours ago with the setting sun; nothing seems to live but the twinkling stars, and a solitary fire-fly, which has wandered up from the warm valley, probably to see the sun set upon the mountains, and is unable to find its way back again with its tiny lamp.

There is something sublimely awful in the solitude and isolation of this great sanctuary of Nature; we seem to be in some other, purer world. As I shut my eyes, the air seems peopled with the shadowy forms of dear ones long since gone to rest,—the little band who have

crossed the dark valley and the troubled sea, and reached the peaceful shore beyond. Gentle eyes look once more into mine, loving hands press my own, the past is again before me, with all its sad and pleasant memories, when we are startled by an apparition, as suddenly appearing as Mephistopheles at the bidding of Faust. A Gnome or Earth-spirit he might be, so silently has he stolen upon us. But a sudden gleam of fire-light shows him to be none other than a very weird and uncanny-looking creature in the flesh. He is almost entirely clad in fur, and presents two fine bear skins for sale, as well as a young bear which he is leading. But we decline to enter into negotiations for either, at which he seems much disappointed, and as far as we can gather from mute language, carried on through the medium of gesticulation, he is sounding the praises of the little Bruin : he takes him in his arms, folds him to his bosom, and does all he can to demonstrate his docile and affectionate disposition ; but we have already possessed tame bears, and juvenile leopards too, and have no wish to make a further acquaintance with them ; and the 'voice of the charmer' failing to make any impression upon us, he disappears as suddenly and mysteriously as he came.

Then we stroll along in the direction of the forest, and pass our servants' camp. The Lepchas and Mahomedans—the latter being men of caste—have each a separate shelter to themselves, made of large boughs hastily thrown together and supported by stakes. Rolled

up tightly in their 'sarees,' or rugs, in such a manner as to display every outline of the face and figure, and lying at full length side by side, they look exactly like mummies.

In the dark portions of the forest where the moon's rays do not penetrate, our attention is arrested by a pale phosphorescent light, and perhaps this is one of the most singular phenomena of the Himalayas; a walk at night near the woods, which are sometimes a-glow with it, being sufficient to excite a sense of the supernatural, even in minds the most practical and prosaic, for the dead trees, which are scattered everywhere, are covered with this blue flame, which, increasing and decreasing with every motion of the wind, looks very ghostly in the 'stilly night,' requiring but slight exercise of the imagination on the part of the observer to fancy that it assumes shape and form. I remember not long ago walking into a dark room at Darjeeling, and being startled at seeing a mass of blue light flickering in a corner. At that time I had not heard of this phenomenon, but on going to fetch a candle and returning with one, I found that it proceeded from a quantity of decayed wood placed there for the morrow's fire. It is, I believe, either during or after the rainy season that it is most seen.

The following morning, after a very comfortable and undisturbed night's rest, and after having given silent thanks to Him, who watched over us during the helpless hours of slumber, we stand outside the hut waiting for our mules, which are to carry us on to Dumsong, a native

settlement in Bhootan. The shed of the mules is not far distant, and we can see it from the verandah of our hut ; but they manifest such a strong determination not to leave it, that at one moment our departure seemed more than doubtful, and it is only by means of physical force brought to bear upon them by the muleteers that they



are induced to advance at last , the above being a faithful sketch made of that interesting tableau whilst standing intently watching their proceedings. But once at our side, F—— after much difficulty succeeded in getting me into my saddle, but scarcely mounted himself with that facility which, as an old equestrian, he had every right to expect.

Once mounted, however, we do manage somehow to make a start ; but they only back us the very next moment to the extreme edge of the 'khud'—*vide* end of chapter (sketch from memory, made whilst sitting on a

portmanteau at the close of journey)—and it is nothing short of a miracle that we are not precipitated over it into the abyss, three thousand feet below. In coming here yesterday, they were on their homeward road, besides which they were *ascending* the whole time, so that we had no opportunity of testing their delightful attributes on level ground.

But off at last, we pass through scenery the character of which changes completely. Instead of dense forests, we traverse undulating wolds, a wild waste of country, surrounded by precipitous mountains, here picturesquely wooded, there torn up by deep gullies and ravines. The principal rocks in these mountains are granite and an imperfect quartz, the latter having the appearance of marble, which is much used in the manufacture of a kind of porcelain. It is conjectured that these mountain ranges contain considerable mineral wealth; but iron and copper are the only metals hitherto discovered, of which iron is the only one as yet applied to much purpose by the natives. And now entering a stratum of mist, we try to make the muleteers lead our steeds, for the path being narrow and rough, it is no easy matter to guide them ourselves in the blinding fog; but they are so utterly obtuse, that by no means in our power can we make them understand what we mean. At last F——, having lost all patience, dismounts to give them ocular demonstration; but they only gaze at him with mouths and eyes wide open, and seem more bewildered than before. I really believe that

Mr. Darwin might here find the 'missing link,' and nurse his pet theory to his heart's content. But the mist soon clears, fortunately—it was only a cloud passing over us—and the sun, again shining, creates a world of beauty and grandeur out of the dim chaos of a few minutes before. But what torturing, agonising creatures are our mules—large bony animals of a roughness of action positively inconceivable to the uninitiated.

Passing over tolerably level ground, we now try to quicken our pace, but our incorrigible animals kick



violently at the slightest touch of the whip. To these little manifestations of temper we should have no objection whatever, if they would only go on when they were over; but no amount of persuasion will induce them to canter for an instant, whilst, if we merely *walk*

them, it will be impossible to reach Dumsong before midnight. We are therefore obliged to accept their conventional and conservative jog-trot pace, as the inevitable. Moreover, the bridle and bit we long ago discovered to be purely ornamental accessories, possibly intended to give them a war-like appearance, for they heed neither ; and we find that the only way of making them move at all—for they soon tire of trotting, and break into a walk—is to tug violently at the reins as if to pull them in, when they make spasmodic efforts to go on. Not unfrequently the breath gets so thoroughly knocked out of us, that we are obliged to stop to recover a little strength, to enable us to endure manfully to the end ; but when jogging on, what torture it is to stop them, and when reined in, what dislocation to get them on again ! I defy the temper of an angel to stand the test of a ride on a Himalayan mule. We try to comfort ourselves, however, by the consideration that we are 'doing' Bhootan—but, in spite of this consoling reflection, we should no doubt long ago have given them up as hopeless, and returned in peace and quiet to the valley, had not our men gone on, not only with our baggage, but, alas ! with all our provisions also, and we needs must follow.

As we went on thus for two agonising hours, the ground began to wear a look of cultivation, and we soon came upon the evidence of man's presence, as shown in smiling patches of millet, buckwheat, and Indian-corn, enclosing neat homesteads, thatched with bamboo, with

overhanging roofs, from which hung bunches of Indian-corn drying in the sun. In the balconies the women of the family could be seen busily occupied in weaving or spinning. But our approach causes much consternation, if not alarm : one and all run into their huts, whence they peer at us through the apertures in the mud walls, or eye us askance through the doorways ; whilst one old woman, whom we met on the road, raced back a long way, till she was quite out of breath and unable to run any further, when, climbing a steep bank, she looked down upon us with a perfectly scared expression, as though she had seen a ghost.

Passing more fields of millet and buckwheat, waving gently in the breeze, we again leave all trace of human habitation behind, and enter an undulating forest, so dense that the light of day is almost excluded. Birds, roused from their solitary haunts, scurry away, rising with a whr-r-r, and flutter and screech, evidently resenting this unusual intrusion in their midst. Ascending and descending very steep gradients, F——, after various misadventures, deserts his noble steed entirely *and walks* ; for not only was the saddle destitute of crupper, but something had gone hopelessly wrong with the whole machinery, so that, when going up hill, he was threatened to be shot over the animal's back, and when going down, in a scarcely less ignominious manner, he was in danger of being precipitated over its neck ; till, coming to an unusually steep descent, he did at last roll over on the

ground, whilst the mule, not the least disconcerted, stood helplessly in the pathway, without attempting to move, the saddle covering its head like a quakeress's bonnet; and never can I forget its benign expression as it peeped forth from beneath it. F——, happily, beyond a severe shaking, was not any the worse for his fall; for a time he lost his hat and saddle-bags, but after some search they were rescued, very wet 'flotsam and jetsam,' in a stagnant pool below.



CHAPTER XV.

THE FLESH-POTS OF BHOOTAN.

THERE is nothing, however dreadful it may be, that does not sooner or later come to an end, and so at length did our weary agonising ride. After six hours, the foliage became thinner, little bits of blue sky were visible through the canopy of leaves, lights danced everywhere, and we reached Dumsong. This is a singularly wild place, and more desolate than I can describe. Although surrounded by a superb and majestic amphitheatre of perpetually snow-capped peaks, their base furrowed by deep chasms and a thousand water-courses, that permeate the whole like arteries in the human frame, there is nothing to relieve the severe outlines of the mountain masses as at Darjeeling, and Nature is seen in her most savage mood.

From the summit of the hill no sign of habitation is visible; but a little lower down, nestling in the bosom of the mountain, a group of Bhootia dwellings is seen. Before leaving Darjeeling we were told that we should here find, a decent 'house' to rest in for the night, the late residence of a Government official, a European, who, with his wife, was stationed for a long time

at Dumsong ; but for what purpose I am at a loss to conceive, for a more heaven-forsaken place can hardly be imagined. We can just see it half a mile distant, standing alone on the spur of a mountain, surrounded by its little 'clearance,' all the rest being covered with thick jungle.

Leaving our wretched mules behind, we walk across to the house, but find that the bats have taken possession of it before us : the thatch has fallen in ; the windows, if there ever were any, have fallen out ; and the entire structure is in such a state of ruin that it is difficult to determine what luxuries it once possessed. It is erected on poles, and climbing the broken ladder, we look in, and discover that the once whitewashed walls are covered with cobwebs, and that colonies of insects have built cells in all its corners.

Curious to enter the only European habitation in these wilds, we cautiously venture through the open doorway, for the flooring has also given way. Instantly a number of bats and large birds come swooping down from the rafters. It is a horrible and ghostly place to be in, and we beat a hasty retreat, not knowing what else we may find there. Walking round the basement, we see traces of the remote existence of a garden, now overgrown with weeds and rank grass ; and there is something very beautiful and touching in these slight indications of the way in which my countrymen pluckily make the best of the worst, and cheerfully submit to the inevitable, by making a *home* in a wilderness of exile, even such as this.

On the summit of a neighbouring hill stand the ruins of an old fort, riddled with shot and shell ; but we have scarcely time to look at anything, for day is waning, and we must find some other shelter. Hastening back, therefore, to the village, where there is a small guard of native police, we hope they will be able to render us some assistance ; and seeing one approach, whom we recognise by his uniform—a white tunic, with crimson turban, and sash round the waist—we endeavour to explain our dilemma. None of our party of servants have yet come up—we passed them on the road more than an hour ago—and this makes our position the more embarrassing ; but the chowkeydar fortunately speaks Hindustani, and at once precedes us to the village to make known our necessities.

All the villagers turn out to see us, obviously regarding us as an immense novelty. Women, children, pariahs, and pigs, whose backs in this country bristle like porcupines, appear to take a lively interest in the affair, all materially assisting in the very noisy discussion which is being carried on, in a shrill key, between the 'chowkeydar' and the 'head-man.' To a stranger they would seem to be quarrelling ; but we have learnt by experience that no transaction, of ever so slight a kind, can be settled by natives without a great deal of unnecessary hubbub and confusion.

Presently this subsides ; the pariahs, having taken the most prominent part in the proceedings, retire with a final yelp to their rubbish heaps, and the pigs to their respective

huts, to quiet the minds of those of their kind which have been detained indoors, and assure them that the matter in hand has been satisfactorily disposed of.

We are now led through the tortuous windings of the little village to a newly erected hut in process of being thatched, which the head-man places at our service, and



which, in the absence of anything better, I need scarcely say we unhesitatingly accept. We have plenty of rugs, happily, to keep us from the cold, and really require nothing more than a thatch to protect us from the heavy dew. Meanwhile, F —, significantly chinking the money in his pocket, bids them by gesture make all speed; and the silver key that speaks every language is eloquent in this instance also, for by the time the sun has set upon

the loftiest peak the shed is completed, and most of our servants have arrived.

Thinking the walk would be too much for the women-folk, we had suggested their staying behind at Kalimpoong; but they preferred coming on with us, and by leaving the pathway which we had to follow on our mules, and striking through the forest, they came a nearer way, and, saving a distance of several miles, arrived as soon as the rest of our people.

By a provoking combination of circumstances, the only two who are lingering behind turn out to be the coolie carrying the provision basket and the cook, the latter, we are told, having been taken ill upon the way. A fire is soon kindled, however, and some game roasting over it, which F—— shot on the way hither, so that at any rate we shall not starve. The villagers, moreover, soon come in procession, bringing eggs, milk, and oranges for sale, together with a nondescript animal, something between a kid and a lamb, but scarcely larger than a good-sized cat. It is such a miserable, half starved looking creature altogether, that we feel it will be a real charity to have it killed, even if we do not eat it; and the kitmutgar, who is evidently a person of sanguine temperament, gives it as *his* opinion that it will make 'very good mutton.'

Whilst the slaughter of the innocent is going on, we stroll out in the moonlight to see some ruined 'mendongs,' little buildings in the shape of temples, their sides covered with upright stone slabs, on which inscriptions are carved

in Thibetan, now half obliterated by time. There are also larger ones, bearing representations of Budh, sitting cross-legged, with rays round the head, intended, as I imagine, to represent a sort of primitive aureola, and with an expression of jovial astonishment in his large round eyes. Below these mendongs, stretches a valley, in which may be traced the course of the Teesta up to its snowy cradle; and the air is so clear and nipping, that the most distant objects are seen with wonderful distinctness, the snowy peaks looking like pale cameos set in sapphire.

The flesh-pots are not encouraging; but too hungry to be very fastidious, we return to our shed, and find not only that dinner is ready, but that, to our horror, besides making 'mutton' of the innocent, which we expected would appear in the shape of cutlets, or some other luxury, at the morrow's breakfast, in the absence of our *chef de cuisine*, they have actually roasted it whole for our present repast, after the manner of 'moorghee grill,' and there it is before us, looking like a spread eagle.

As we sit inside the shed, and try to be contented with such fare as the gods give us, a homeless pariah creeps in stealthily, and seats himself by my side, a humble petitioner for bounty; one of those waifs that always make me unhappy even to remember them. The foxes have holes, and the jackals their home in the jungle; but the pariah, though half domestic, and haunting the abode of man, is kicked and cuffed by all classes of society, an outcast, for which no place in life is granted. They

consequently wear that friendless, 'down in the mouth,' but sorrowfully resigned look, almost human in its sadness, which, with my affection for all animals, makes my very heart ache to see, and when I say 'poor fellow,' as I always do, or give them some other word of greeting, they turn upon me first an abject gaze, in which profound amazement is mingled, and then, as if awakening at last to some faint inkling of my kindly meaning, very slightly wag the tail, in all probability for the first and last time in their whole lives. To me a pariah is the saddest thing in nature, and my friendship for them has won for me the proud title of the 'pariah's friend.'

Then crouching round our camp-fire we listen to the singing of Tartar melodies—for the Bhootias, like every other nation, also possess a primitive music—and to a man in a neighbouring hut twanging out a Thibetan air on a kind of guitar, whilst others sing; the whole rendered all the more sweet by an occasional obligato accompaniment of jackals in the distance.



CHAPTER XVI.

A MIDNIGHT CONCERT.

'TIRED nature's sweet restorer' was far from us that night. How could it be otherwise? Sheep bleated, cows grunted—Bhootia cows always do—whilst the herd of jackals which discoursed plaintive music from a more distant 'platform' earlier in the evening, waxing bold, as balmy sleep fell on the human inhabitants of the little village, came near, and favoured us with a serenade.

The natives took no notice of them, however, appearing, on the contrary, to be sleeping soundly within their huts, possibly soothed to rest by these warblers of the night. And why not? for, after all, beauty of sound as well as form often consists as much in association as in the object itself; Mr. Ruskin, who ought to be an authority in such matters, declaring Beauty to be a phantom of the brain, called up by association merely. But whether it arise from idealism, gregariousness, or a real attribute of external nature, it matters little in the present case, for to *our* ears, not familiarised to these nightingales by habit or fond association, the sound resembled a dismal and unearthly wailing of women, with a strong dash of the hyæna, to which a whole kennel of hounds baying the

moon would in comparison have been as loveliest music of the spheres.

With all possible admiration for the brave captain of the *Rob-Roy*, I cannot agree with him, when, alluding to the 'wild jackal's scream' of Egypt, he describes it as 'plaintive, clear, and not unmusical, but rather lulls to slumber.' My recollection of the Egyptian jackal—for I too have sojourned in that land—is, that its strains are no sweeter, but precisely those of its Indian brethren; and I ask my compatriots in exile, whether those nocturnal visitants to their 'compounds' are wont to produce a sweet and soothing lullaby or otherwise, and whether Mr. McGregor's sense of 'beauty,' for once, is not ideal to an unusual extent?

We were, besides all these, beset by a pariah, one of my 'pets,' as F——, disturbed from his slumbers, reproachfully called it, which stood at the entrance to the shed, barking and howling by turns, threatening to make a dash at us perpetually through the open doorway; but he (F——) was provokingly philosophical about the whole, and with an occasional 'Get out!' administered in stentorian accents, maintained silence throughout the night, save when snoring euphoniously beneath his rugs, whilst I sat up in a perfect whirl of excitement and apprehension.

We had previously intended making another day's journey into the interior, but now decide to remain here, to give our people a day's rest, and then to return to-morrow, feeling we have seen quite as much of Bhootan

as we care for. A beautiful picture of the snowy range may be made from this spot, with the 'mendongs'—which some affirm to be Lama tombs—for a foreground, so that the day need not be spent altogether unprofitably. The aspect of the mountains, too, is so completely changed from this position that none of the peaks with which we are familiar at Darjeeling are recognisable. Beneath the highest, at an elevation of about 22,000 feet, are two singular columns of rock, their base embedded in the snow; and one can hardly help fancying, from the regularity of their formation, that, instead of being the result of nature's mighty agency, they must have been hewn, and placed there by some human, but Giant hand.

It is interesting to observe the effect which these grand and sublime scenes have upon Lattoo's untutored mind. All Lepchas are true worshippers of nature under whatever form, and, although a Bhootia, she has much more of the Lepcha in her disposition than that of her own race. When walking along, she will often stop suddenly, as some new loveliness of mountain, river, or wayside flower strikes her, and gaze in silent wonder; mountains particularly seeming to have a solemnising effect upon her, as they have upon some minds. There was a reserved grace and dignity about her occasionally, at which I marvelled greatly in one of her class, and, in spite of her little caprices and laughing eye, her face would assume a sad and pensive expression, as though there were thoughts and feelings within her, to which she longed but

could never find words to give utterance, till the yearning became almost painful. Her mind was like a rich but uncultivated soil, whose depths I longed to open, and she became, if possible, an object of greater interest to me each day.

'I wish I was already *thar*, mem sahib,' she said to me as I sat beneath the mendongs sketching the beautiful snows with the evening light upon them. 'We shall be soon, eh, mem sahib?'

'You must not be too sure of going with us, Lattoo,' I replied; 'the sahib has not yet decided that you *are* to go.' For I saw she had set her heart upon it, and I did not wish to disappoint her. She had already proved herself rather wilful since she had been with me, even these few days, and I began to realise in my heart of hearts that to have her with me for a permanency would be much the same as having a young hippopotamus, or some other half-tamed creature, highly amusing and delightful for a time, and at stated intervals, but nevertheless an anxiety and worry to have about one every day, and all day long. Only this morning a little episode occurred that gave me some insight into her character.

Leaving the shed I caught sight of a strange little figure approaching, which at first I had some difficulty in recognising.

'Is that *you* Lattoo!' I exclaimed, as she made me a little curt salaam.

In the place of the pretty headgear she knew I liked

so well, and her hair neatly braided beneath it, she had the latter tucked back, and completely hidden by a yellow cotton handkerchief bound round the head, in the most unbecoming way possible ; and one glance at her defiant look and compressed lips, so unlike the placid pensive smile with which she usually greeted me, showed plainly enough that her appearance was not the result of accident, but design. All at once I recollected that I had had occasion to reprove her slightly last night, and, like a naughty wayward child, she was no doubt resenting it, by rendering her appearance as unpleasing as possible. She had evidently not forgotten, either, the pains I took to arrange the folds of her skirt, when she stood for her portrait, for she had now pinned it behind her in great awkward plaits. It was difficult to help laughing at this bewitching little Fury, but I took no notice of her, feeling assured that that was the quickest way of restoring her to her former gentle, happy self. With the remembrance of this little ebullition of temper still present with me, I repeated,

‘I do not think the sahib will let me take you, Lattoo ; you know you could not walk all the way, and we should have to take bearers to carry you. The sahib has been very good to let you be with me so long now, and you must be grateful for this, and not repine because you cannot have all that you would like.’

The following morning we mount our mules again, and hope by starting early to reach Kalimpong in time

to give ourselves and them a short rest, and then go on to the Teesta. Now that F—— has improvised a crupper for his saddle, and the mules have their heads turned in a homeward direction, they jog on more amiably. As we descend through the forest, two wolves cross our path fifty yards ahead. F—— tries to shoot them but misses. He bags some game, however, to replenish the commissariat, consisting of a hill partridge and argus pheasant; the latter a beautiful bird with scarlet feathers, dotted all over with small white spots, like eyes. Later in the day he also shot a waterfowl the size of a large duck, the plumage of which was dark-blue and yellow, and its legs and the broad webbed feet the brightest orange.

One cannot help being greatly struck with the appearance of Bhootan as one passes through it; that is to say, of those portions which are under cultivation. The soil is rich, the crops abundant, and the people themselves look very thriving, their large and commodious huts being surrounded by fields of millet and bhoota. But there can be small encouragement for the amassing of wealth in a country where, on the death of the head of a family—no matter how numerous the children he leaves behind him, or what the nature of their requirements—the whole of his property reverts to the Deb Rajah, and where the people generally are over-ridden by the Soobahs, and taxed beyond bearing.

On our arrival at Kalimpoong, we find our cook, who appears to be in a highly flourishing condition of body and



mind. We have a very shrewd suspicion that he has induced our baggage coolies, probably by the promise of 'backsheesh,' to say he had been taken ill upon the road, and that in reality he had not left this place at all, but spent the time pleasantly in the society of the Guards, with whom he seems to be on exceedingly friendly terms.

We are here told that it would be unwise to attempt to leave this place before to-morrow, and that if we persisted in doing so we should in all probability be benighted on the downward way, not a very pleasant prospect with the gorge full of leopards. We are perfectly willing, however, to put up once upon this desert with a comfortable hut, which, after our Dunsong camp, seems positively luxurious.

Accordingly, at noon the next day we reach the bank of the Teesta, where everything looks more lovely than ever, after the bleak and desolate regions we have quitted. The flowing river, the picturesque figures crossing the frail bridge, and the wondrous luxuriance and brilliant coloring of the vegetation, all delight us. We bid a fond farewell to our wretched mules, who have been governing the hold in the forest, and giving us the 'backsheesh' of the mulberry and the fig, which they seem capable of understanding. We bid a fond farewell for more—we come to a small, comfortable shanty, though for a short time, and having sent our baggage coolies on to the next resting place, we enter the shanty.

We linger till evening approaches, and then cross the Teesta on the bamboo raft I have before described. A frail bark it truly is to trust oneself upon, the rapids making its tiny timbers creak and strain, as though it must break up and fall to pieces. The swift bounding current bears us to the right, and reaching the opposite



shore, we walk a little higher up the river, and find that the Lepchas have already made 'leaf huts' for Lattoo and ourselves in a little romantic spot, close to the margin of the river; and very rural abodes they are, whilst the breeze, blowing through the freshly gathered boughs, renders them cool and fragrant.

As we are in a very lonely place, surrounded by jungle, provision is at once made for large fires, to prevent any invasion of wild beasts during the night. After this the Lepchas again set traps to catch fish, and then making cups of their hands, they bale up water and sprinkle it about them, as if invoking the protection of the river god; for, like the Hindoos, they have a mythology.

Lattoo has been less mirthful to-day. Last night, after retiring to our hut, I heard voices speaking outside

in subdued tones for a long time, and on looking out, I found her talking in an earnest manner to the 'butterfly Lepcha.' They were both opposite the camp-fire, which, burning brightly, enabled me to distinguish their features perfectly.

'Lattoo!' I exclaimed, appearing out of the darkness, and standing before them like an inconvenient and inopportune ghost, 'What are you doing here? You will catch cold.'

'All right, mem sahib,' she replied, turning round sharply, and speaking in her pretty broken English, with the least possible tremor in her voice. 'Lepcha man only fetch bring Lattoo *watter*.'

I had had no opportunity of alluding to the matter during the day, for she had, as I fancied, studiously avoided me; but as soon as I reached the Rungheet, and had her quietly in the hut all to myself, I remarked that the young Lepcha had all along seemed much more fond of walking by her side than of catching butterflies, and that the sahib had noticed it. Hereupon she burst into a passionate flood of tears, and throwing herself on the ground, clasped my feet, saying.—

'Oh, mem sahib! don't be hard upon him; it is poor Atchoo. I did not want him to come, but he would.'

'But do you think it was kind of you, Lattoo, to keep me in the dark? You know I have always been your friend, and shown you what sympathy I could.'

'Eh, mem sahib, yes! but I was afraid.'

‘Afraid of what?’

‘Of the sahib; afraid that he might punish Atchoo if you told him of it.’

At this juncture our conversation was cut short by the entrance of the sahib himself, who bade me come out



and enjoy the moonlight, and I could say no more on the subject then.

F—— and I paced the bank of the river to and fro, near our little encampment, till the moon had not only

risen behind the tree-fringed mountain crest, but crossed the gorge. It was our last bivouac in this peaceful valley, and we would make the most of it. Retiring soon after midnight, we slept soundly till two o'clock, when I was awakened by a distant noise as of branches bending and snapping in the forest behind us, then the muffled thud of footsteps, whether human or otherwise I could not determine, but hoped it might be merely those of some of our men. At length there was a sudden burst of sound, as if the very boughs of our hut were being torn out. Shrieking for F——, I found the noise had not only aroused him, but that he was searching for his rifle. Cautiously opening the door—a kind of impromptu hurdle—he discerned what in the darkness appeared to be nothing more formidable than a number of cows surrounding us. Meanwhile shouting lustily for our people, who had carelessly allowed the fires to die out, he struck a light, and venturing outside, found a herd of buffalo quietly grazing on the leaves of our abode—eating it up, in fact!

Dangerous creatures as they sometimes are, they were easily frightened away on this occasion. They made up for their docility, however, by bellowing furiously, the sound they produce being something between the snort of a walrus and the grunt of a Bhootia cow, and the forest rang with these wild orgies for at least an hour afterwards.

Making our men relight the fires, we once more sub-

sided into comfortable sleep, and at peep of day, strolling down by the river, we saw the buffalo swimming across. Very singular and interesting it was to see the great black ungainly fellows doing battle with the current, and floundering about, with their square nostrils just out of the water. We here learnt that they belonged to a party of Bhootias, who were taking them over to Sikkim, and who themselves were camping near the little bridge at the entrance of the gorge, but were nevertheless wholly unconscious of the straying of their kine.

Then before the night bird had ceased his plaint, we started on our homeward road, brushing through banks of ferns and the great heart-shaped bigonia, with its pink wax-like flowers smiling through tears of dew, which rained down upon us as we passed.

On the margin of the river a tree was growing, which our syces pointed out to us, and the fruit of which the natives use to poison fish. Saturating rice with a decoction of the poison, they throw it into the river, and the fish devouring it die, and floating to the surface, are easily taken. Then coming to a bend in the river, we saw a Lepcha paddling his canoe across the rapids—a rude bark, hollowed out of a tree—on his way to a little establishment of wood-cutters on the opposite bank, the smoke of whose fire, ascending in blue columns against the sombre background of trees, made a picture for an artist.

We reach the Rungheet guard-post at noon, and

halt, not only to give our ponies rest, but to partake of breakfast. The fire is soon lighted, and an omelette frizzling over it, which, with hunter's beef, is to form our frugal meal. Several of the baggage coolies have already arrived, but the one carrying the crockery basket is loitering in the rear; wherefore it is only truthful to confess, that, *faute de dish*, we eat it with all due solemnity out of the frying-pan!



When our ponies have rested sufficiently, we make another start. Threading our way through the mimosa thicket, we re-cross the little bridge, and pass beneath *pandanus palms*, *Gordonia*, and the ever stately sol; till, ascending, we leave these far behind, and entering a tea-plantation, zig-zag through miles and miles of tea bushes, and find ourselves in regions where the air blows chill. On, till we reach the plantation coolies' huts, all built close together, as if to keep each other warm. In the tall forest trees beyond, the thrush is carolling his evensong; and soon the less harmonious strains of the band reach us, playing

in the 'kiosk,' at the *Chow rusta*, whither each evening the beauty and fashion of the little station resort—a circumstance which has caused the profane to stigmatise it as the Temple of Gossip. Whether it be devoted to that Muse or not, it cannot always in truth be called the Temple of Harmony, for, although there is a battery of artillery at the military cantonment, no regiment is at present stationed there, it being rather a sanitarium for invalids. The band therefore is generally composed of men of various regiments, who have been sent here for health, and their performances, as they have no bandmaster to regulate them, are as a rule not of a very soul-inspiring nature. At this moment the trombone is carrying on a very imposing and conscientious bass on a single note in one key, whilst a sharp little piccolo, which sets one's teeth on edge, is indulging in coruscations in a shrill treble in another; the intermediate instruments, meanwhile, doing their best to complete the discord by an extemporaneous compromise between an accompaniment and variations of the 'air.' But, on the other hand, the drum, beaten by a muscular artilleryman, covers a multitude of sins and shortcomings, and a herd of approving jackals in the distance howls an encore.

Our homeward road lies through this gay and festive throng; but, feeling painfully conscious that our appearance is not rendered the more interesting by the out-of-doors life we have been leading, and unwilling to subject ourselves either to fair or unfair criticism, we steal round

by a path below—though by a longer route—which takes us through the outskirts of the Bhootia Busti, where the usual number of bipeds and quadrupeds of all sorts and sizes have to be ridden through and over, and where we ourselves get blinded with smoke, for the narrow pathway, leading us above the roofs of the little huts which cling to the hill-sides, occasionally affords us suffocating glimpses through the holes in the thatch, which are the primitive chimneys of these people. At length, entering the high road, we overtake a number of invalid soldiers lying in dhoolies, a kind of bed carried on men's shoulders—'ferocious dhoolies,' as they were once called in high quarters in England during the mutiny, having been mistaken for some wild hill tribe—which was hard upon them, to say the least of it; the pathetic rendering of the homeward dispatches being, that 'the ferocious Dhoolies came down and carried all the sick and wounded away!'

The poor fellows we pass have been sent hither from the scorching plains, with their fever-stricken and otherwise sickly frames, to grow strong and well, please God! in this pure and invigorating mountain air. It is, indeed, wonderful in how short a time they do so; that is to say, those who are suffering merely from the ordinary complaints incidental to the plains, there being few cases in which the sudden change of climate operates prejudicially. It is very sad to see some of these, who appear terribly ill and emaciated, leading one to fear that they may have been sent hither too late, and that Death

has already set his cold hand upon them. To one man, who seems much exhausted by his long journey, we give a little wine we happen to have with us in a pocket flask, for which he is very grateful; and turning his wan face towards F——, exclaims, 'Oh, sir! I never see such a beautiful country, never in my borned days;' but we tell him that he must wait till he reaches *Jellapahar*—the military cantonment—and sees the morrow's sun rise on the snow-clad peaks, to know what glory and sublimity are in nature. Ascending the steep, steep path that leads to the hospital, they are soon lost sight of in the gathering darkness; and rounding the spur of the hill and nearing our pretty mountain dwelling, the first things that attract our notice are two white specks on the lawn, which prove to be the tents pitched, which we are to take on our longer trip into the 'Interior.'



THE 'FFROCIOUS DHOOLIF!'

CHAPTER XVII.

AWAY TO THE SNOWS !

BESIDES thirty-two baggage coolies, we were to take four servants—viz. a kitmutgar, bearer, and two syces—exclusive of the *sirdar*, or head man, who is supposed to be responsible for the conduct of the rest, keep them up to their duties, and see that none cheat or take advantage of you but himself.

Six men were to be laden with tents, one with our small tent-stove, and two others with rum for the baggage coolies—a thing we were strongly advised to take a good supply of, as being very necessary on such an expedition, enabling them to resist not only cold but fever, to which night exposure invariably subjects them when they get into inclement heights. In addition to these, twelve were told off to carry tent furniture and travelling impediments generally, and the rest to carry my dandy.

A Bareilly dandy is a kind of reclining chair made of cane, and suspended by leather straps to a strong rim of wood, the shape of a boat, with a pole at each end. This was to be *my* mode of conveyance; F—— and C—— having decided to take ponies for themselves, being

sanguine enough to believe that they will ride the chief part of the way, for these strong little beasts are supposed capable of performing any gymnastic achievement, short of walking upon their heads : but there are limits to the *temper*s, as we have seen, if not to the capabilities, of the Himalayan pony, and whether they sustained their character to the end, or proved a delusion and a snare, will be seen hereafter.

Some little delay was caused by the difficulty our *sirdar* found in obtaining Lepchas to accompany us. They are said to make infinitely better servants than the Bhootias ; but at the last moment we were compelled to content ourselves with fourteen of the latter tribe amongst our retinue.

I will not linger over the few days that preceded our departure, which were spent in wishing friends good-bye, and in making the thousand and one little arrangements necessary for such an expedition, and an absence of many weeks' duration from all civilisation. It had been settled between F—— and myself that Lattòo was not to go, at which on her side many bitter tears were shed ; but for many reasons it seemed wiser that I should not take an ayah with me.

I was putting the finishing touches to my packing in the twilight, two evenings before we started, when she came with downcast eyes, and placing something in my hand, which I saw at a glance was the old silver charm-box that once belonged to her mother, said sorrowfully,

‘Mem sahib go to bad country, where no trees, no flowers, no nothing grow, where the sun shines cold, and where men starve and die, the country of the dreadful moth.¹ Wicked spirits live in the rocks *thar*; take this and no harm come,—no take, plenty trouble.’

I looked involuntarily towards the window; a ghastly pallor had spread itself over the snowy peaks, which were bathed in glory but a few minutes before, and black clouds lowered overhead. The room was getting dark and chilly, and Lattoo looked so sad and earnest. Could it be true that unknown dangers lurked there? Were there wicked spirits inhabiting the rocks that could be charmed away? The next moment reason triumphed. ‘No, child,’ I exclaimed impatiently; ‘take it away, I don’t believe in charms.’

‘Nae, mem sahib! but it contains Lama prayers.’

‘God will protect us, Lattoo; we are going to see His beautiful mountains, and to learn more of Him and of His greatness in the works of His hand. Do not tease me so. I have no fear.’

Turning round I discovered that the room was empty. Lattoo had gone, leaving me abruptly, as she had so often done before. There was nothing strange in her doing so, but I felt sorry she had gone—I was not to see her again for many many weeks; and she looked so pale and sad, and I had meant to comfort, and

¹ There is a legend that a large moth exists in the interior of these mountain regions which causes the death of all whom it may touch.

— — — — —
speak tender words of parting to her, but instead of this I had spoken harshly. Poor child ! How little I then thought what would happen to her ere I returned to Darjeeling !

The next day we dispatched our coolies, in company with those of our friend C——, numbering altogether fifty-eight—exclusive of fifteen he had already sent on—with instructions to proceed to Goke, a small guard-post fourteen miles distant, and to await our arrival there.

Each man carried not only the loads apportioned to him, but sufficient food for a week or two for himself also, consisting chiefly of rice and bhoota. Beyond that time C—— had made provision for them, by arranging with the Soubahs and Kajeets¹ of the Rajah's territories, through which we should have to pass, to send supplies to meet us at the various points along our route, a thing they promised faithfully to do, but, alas ! how has my confidence in princes been shaken for evermore ! But I must not anticipate.

Had not C—— so arranged, we must have taken double the number of men, to convey sufficient food for the whole distance, as the way which we had decided to take lay over barren wilds, far above and beyond the reach of villages, where they might otherwise have replenished for themselves. There are no roads in the 'Interior,' or even pathways, and after leaving Darjeeling a very few marches behind, we shall have to follow the leading of our

¹ Agents and Finance Ministers.

instincts, and trust to the configuration of the distant mountains to guide us onwards.

As I stood at the window, watching the coolies one by one disappear beneath the hill with their loads, my pulse beat fast, and my heart throbbed ; not, however, from the proud anticipation that we were about to travel amongst the most extensive and lofty mountains of the world, but—shall I confess it?—from misgivings lest, after all, the prophets of evil should be right, and I prove incapable of sustaining the fatigue of such a journey. Yonder lay the whole vast expanse of the Sub-Himalaya, Alp upon Alp, and wave upon wave of blue mountain, varying in height from eight to fourteen thousand feet, all of which we must cross before reaching even the *base* of the snowy range, fifty miles distant as a bird would fly, but nearly one hundred and fifty to us.

Several gentlemen had penetrated into the 'interior' by the direct route—viz. that along the valleys of the rivers Runghe.t and Ratong—by which, until Jongli is reached—the highest point where yāks are grazed in the summer months—villages are frequently to be met with ; but scarcely more than one European¹ had traversed the crest of the Singaleelah chain, the route which we had marked out for ourselves—and I was the first lady to explore the Eastern Himalaya by either way ; so that it was no marvel, if I felt a few qualms, and a little trepidation, when our men had actually departed, and the irrevocable step was taken.

¹ This one is the eminent naturalist Dr. Hooker.

A friend through whose plantation we should have to pass on our first day's march, most kindly asked us to sleep at his house *en route*, as by so doing we should be enabled to reach our first camping-place, at Goke, early the following day. Accordingly, on a *Friday*—that inauspicious day—we make the grand start.

The rains, that usually break up about the beginning of October, had been protracted this year beyond all precedent, and there had been such a determined and steady down-pour for three days after our return from the Teesta, as can only be witnessed either in the Tropics, or in the mountainous districts of this land. But, most fortunately, the very day we decide to start, the weather clears; and as we descend the mountain steeps, the clouds which have gathered up are clinging in huge masses beneath their summits, whose rugged edges drag and hold them in their grasp like carded wool. Notwithstanding this, in the purpling valleys at our feet, a sea of leaden vapour is still floating, and, although the horizon above the highest peaks is bright and clear, there is a sharpness in their outline that has a suspicious look, auguring anything but the end of the rainy season. We are too happy, however, to admit of forebodings or ill omens of any kind: everything is *couleur de rose*; as indeed the sky is by this time, for the sinking sun is tingeing the Snows with his parting rays, whilst they tower, spire-like, upwards as if to see the last of him.

Emerging from a grove of tree-ferns, we can just

discern our tents, three or four thousand feet below, already pitched in readiness for us, looking like little white dots on the spur of a wooded hill; and reaching the house at six o'clock, we are welcomed in the verandah by our pretty hostess.



The house stands at an elevation of about 5000 feet, and although situated at rather too low an altitude for fine views generally, it commands a magnificent one of the eternal Snows, and a whole world of mountains, over which the monarch Kinchinjunga reigns supreme. It is a pretty little dwelling, not altogether unlike a Swiss chalet, having wooden balconies all round it, covered with the passion flower, Virginia creeper, and other climbing plants, and in every respect in perfect keeping with the surrounding scenery. A cup of fragrant tea awaits us in the verandah, such as is alone to be met with

at a planter's house—very few who partake in England of that which is dignified by the name, having the faintest notion of what a delicious thing it really is ; adulteration, or mixing with inferior teas, taking place almost immediately after it leaves the plantation. Nor is quality the only desideratum to its perfection—new-made tea, even of the best, tasting very much like fresh hay with an additional flavouring of mint ; and it is only after the third year that it acquires its full flavour. A lady residing in a tea district is consequently as particular in the age of her tea, as a gentleman is in that of his wine.

Dinner at seven ; and a delightful evening afterwards, passed with music, and all the graceful *entourages* of an English home ; and then, on saying 'good night,' a peep into the balcony—'just,' as our host said, 'to snatch *one* look at the snows,' upon which the moon had risen. The one look ended in our pacing it to and fro till midnight, all being unwilling to close our eyes on a scene so lovely.

The next morning after breakfast we take leave of our kind entertainers, and continue our descent through the plantation. Here again we see patient women gathering tea, their small babies, as usual, lying in baskets, and I come to the conclusion that, of all things living, there is nothing half so pretty as a Bhootia or Lepcha baby, with its tiny round face and large eyes, the size of the latter enhanced by *kohl*, with which the eyelids are painted. They smile at me as I pass them, lying quietly in their little baskets, but always wide awake ; and I

cannot help wondering whether Bhootia or Lepcha babies ever sleep.

Sometimes I stop for an instant and chat with their mothers, winning their hearts by admiration of their children, then hasten on again, for F—— and C—— are both some distance in advance; but I can occasionally catch a glimpse of the tops of their helmets and alpenstocks as



they zig-zag beneath, whilst counting time to the heavy tramp-tramp of my bearers as they carry me along.

Zig-zagging still, and always descending, the heat becomes oppressive, and tropical vegetation begins. Clumps of pampas-grass, growing ten feet high, now enclose our pathway on either side; and I start involuntarily as its tall dry stems, rocking to and fro, creak and crack and knock against each other, as they will do, strangely

enough, even in the absence of the slightest breeze to stir the air; and I am reminded of the conventional tiger of my childhood, and see it breaking cover to spring upon the luckless traveller, as it did in my first picture-book.

But there are no tigers here, this not being the elevation for them; and leopards do not often leave their lairs till night-fall, and are by no means the formidable animals they are generally reputed to be, planters having repeatedly assured us that they seldom if ever attack man, being, on the contrary, much afraid of him. A child or feeble person they probably would attack if hungry, but not otherwise, preferring, as a rule, to dine off jungle fauna, their favourite prey being the 'barking deer.'

A few months ago, however, I did have a much nearer view of one than I at all appreciated, notwithstanding these assurances. I was sketching at mid day in a gorge about five thousand feet below Darjeeling, where the most perfect and absolute solitude reigns, and where a river, unseen till approached quite closely, flows cradled in precipitous rocks, the water black in some places, from the deep shadow they cast upon its surface. Sitting on one of the boulders in mid-stream, an otter, or some other small animal, bounded out of the thick jungle to my right, and came down to the margin of the river to drink. Following slowly, with cat-like footsteps, as if it had been lying in ambush, a

leopard crept forth in pursuit, climbing one of the large stones on the bank, as though to watch its movements, and take his opportunity to pounce upon it. But, contrary to his expectations, instead of returning, his prey swam across the stream, and was soon lost sight of amongst the rocks and sand on the opposite side. The leopard followed a few yards, and then finding it had eluded his grasp, cast one regretful glance at its hiding-place, and almost as stealthily returned to the jungle whence it came.

I was terribly frightened, far too much so to make at the moment any demonstration of alarm, and my attendants in charge of my pony, being some distance off, knew nothing of my adventure. Had they been present, they would have fled to a certainty, leaving me to face the danger alone, for there is but little chivalry in natives; but as soon as I had recovered sufficient composure I summoned them to my side, and hastily packing up my sketch, which I had ridden so many miles to take, was soon on my homeward way.

On another occasion I was sketching with a friend in the very heart of a primeval forest, several thousand feet below Seshul, our men and ponies this time being bivouacked close beside us. Suddenly we heard the cries of a small animal proceeding from a place some hundreds of feet up the mountain. At length they grew fainter and fainter till they died away, and the forest was as silent as before. Half an hour or so had elapsed,

when the sound of cracking and crushing down of bushes reached us, as though something larger than the creature whose cries we had heard were forcing its way through the underwood. Almost immediately, about a hundred yards ahead of us, a tiger broke cover, and, leaping over the path, disappeared down the 'khud.' Scrambling our things together—and this time paying little heed to the safety of our pictures—our ponies were saddled, and we on them in a twinkling; and shrieking loudly, which we had been told natives always do in proximity to wild beasts, we started off at a hand gallop.

Our path unfortunately would of necessity lead us past the very spot where the tiger showed himself; but even-
ing was approaching, the sun already sinking below the summit of the opposite hill, and there was nothing for it but to get out of the woods, and into the high road, as fast as possible. Reaching the spot, we felt little doubt, from the presence of a mountain streamlet, that he had followed its course down to a forest pool, to slake his thirst after his meal, for the fact of his making his appearance so soon after the cries I have mentioned led to the conjecture that he had killed and devoured some prey.

The next day we were told that a large tiger had been at Senshul the two previous nights, and carried off a goat each time. It is a very unusual thing for tigers to be heard of at this elevation, but I need scarcely say that I never ventured to sketch in one of these lonely and unfrequented forests again. My impression is that

persons might ride or walk through them for years, without meeting with such an adventure, for I believe that none of these animals would leave their lairs by day, if they heard but the slightest approach of man ; but if one sits silently sketching hour after hour, with one's attendants stretched on the ground fast asleep, the forest is as still as if wholly untenanted.

During this digression, we have been steadily descending the mountain, till we have left the tea plantation behind ; and now pass through dense jungle of bamboo, wild plantain or banana, the leafless cotton tree covered with scarlet blossoms, and the *cinchona*, with its delicate and exquisite sapphire bloom, beneath all of which is a fantastic undergrowth of aromatic wormwood, flowering shrubs, and ferns, each struggling for the mastery, and rank luxuriance everywhere.

At noon we reach the banks of a river—the Chota (little) Rungheet—having in four hours passed through various climates, till we are now in heat almost unbearable. F—— gathers some ripe lemons and pomiloes from a little plantation of fruit, under which we halt for shade, and with these we refresh ourselves in the scorching valley. The recent heavy rains having swollen the river to an unusual degree, it is found impossible to cross on our ponies, and we are therefore compelled to leave them behind in charge of the syces, trusting they will be able to follow us on the morrow.

Here we find a party of some fifteen or twenty

men, whom C—— sent on some days ago, engaged in the construction of a bamboo bridge, the permanent one of cane being out of repair, and consequently in an unsafe state for passengers; but the temporary bridge is so far from completion, that we determine not to wait for it, but cross the other as well as we can. It is almost severed in the centre, but with care we severally gain the opposite bank, and soon find ourselves toiling up the slope in blazing sunshine. The gentlemen, finding the climb very fatiguing, deplore the absence of their ponies; but I fare far better in my dandy, my bearers carrying me, four at a time, relieving each other at frequent intervals, until at two o'clock they land me on Goke spur.

This is a small frontier post, guarded by a few native soldiers, the Rimmām—a river we can hear plunging over its rocky bed on the other side of the hill—forming the boundary between British and independent Sikkim, just as the Teesta does between our territory and Bhootan; one of its chief objects being to prevent the Sikkimites from crossing over the border, and taking back British subjects as slaves, a proceeding of which some few years ago they were by no means unfrequently guilty.

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNDER CANVAS.

OUR tents, five in number, look exceedingly snug and comfortable ; and very gladly do I take shelter in one of them from the fierce rays of the sun, for we are as yet at an elevation of scarcely more than three thousand feet. And what a peculiar fascination these little canvas homes possess for those who have never lived in one before. The low doorway, beneath which one has to enter ; the compactness of the canvas walls ; the fitness and suitability of everything—nothing superfluous, nothing really lacking ; the *multum in parvo* style of its whole arrangements ; the little square awning which forms a shelter to the aperture, all so small and doll-like ; the lazy flapping of the canvas with every motion of the wind ; the gentle twitter of birds, and subdued noises outside ; the peep of the sweet country through the open doorway ; the shadows on the sunlit grass ; the blue of the distant hills ; and the novelty of the whole thing, as one feels one's self for the first time a 'rover' in very earnest—all possess a charm that is perfectly indescribable. As I sit here I look out upon the cooking tent, where vigorous preparations for dinner are going on,

whilst a kettle is purring cheerily over another fire close by, all looking like a little framed picture; and though we have the blue sky for a canopy, and the green sward for a carpet, everything looks so completely the ideal of contentment and home, that I almost wish I had been born a gipsy.

C—— soon arrives, but F—— not for an hour later, frightfully knocked up by the heat and long climb, and I must confess that his feeling the fatigue of the first day's march so greatly, filled me with forebodings for the future, he being by no means the strongest of our trio.

Like the rest of us, however, he revived considerably on being informed that dinner was almost ready, and was nearly recovered when it was announced. On seeing him work his way valiantly through two cutlets, and survive all the vicissitudes of curried chicken, besides light skirmishing, in the shape of pastry and cheese, my anxieties took a different form, and the serious question arose within me, as to whether the alarming gastronomic capabilities which we all evince, fostered evidently by long marches in the open air, can be provided for on such an expedition as ours, whether the commissariat will hold out, and the supply be equal to the demand.

To-morrow being Sunday we halt here, and shall not start on our tour in real earnest until Monday. Nor are we sorry, for the scene from our camp, looking in a northerly direction, is peaceful and lovely in the extreme, and we are more than willing to linger in so fair a spot.

Southwards, however, rises the barren Chakoong, frequent landslips having laid it bare, as well as numerous watercourses, which scour down its sides in the rainy season. Skirting its ridge, a number of little black specks are seen, cutting into the sky with sharp outline : they are the houses at Jellapahar, the military dépôt. Beneath them extend many thousand feet of sheer precipice, and the mountains in *this* direction are altogether unpleasing, the forests having been cut down to give place to tea-planting, every hill-side being studded with this uninteresting and irrepressible shrub. It is wonderful to what an extent this 'fever' prevails. It rages like a fierce epidemic in the neighbourhood of Darjeeling and Kursiong, where all who have money—except Government officials, who are prohibited—buy a few acres of land, and plunge into tea. Calcutta merchants and retired military officers have caught the mania ; and even missionaries, sent from a foreign land to convey the everlasting truth to these 'benighted heathen,' have been known to succumb to the contagion, and, leaving their Gospel nets, to follow the multitude. F—— also was once numbered amongst the stricken, but, as I said before, men in the service of Government are forbidden from entering upon any speculation of the kind ; and this I believe alone prevented our both falling victims to the contagion, for there is something very attractive in a planter's life, and I can imagine nothing so free, unfettered, and charming as that of these hills, where he has an admirable climate, glorious

scenery around him, and plenty of society—for whenever is a planter's house void of one or two pleasant guests, and where does a guest so completely enjoy himself or feel so thoroughly *à son aise* as there? Who else can give one so good a 'mount?' What merry pic-nics to the valleys! What delicious scampers over the mountains! What pleasant gatherings in the evening over cheery wood fires still live in my remembrance! Yet tea-planters have a great deal to answer for, in robbing these hills of so much of their beauty.

As the eye turns from civilization, that dire enemy of the picturesque, over in the direction of independent Sikkim, where Nature still holds her own, the scene changes completely, exhibiting picturesquely wooded mountains, and far down the valleys, here and there, little patches of fertile pasture land—a great relief after the tea-covered hills on the opposite side.

The sky is almost cloudless, and full of deliciously soft light. F—— reclines at the tent door, smoking, and the combined influence of the dinner, the weed, and the monotonous humming of bees in the bushes behind us, seems to have produced a somnolent effect. He sits, his head thrown back, and his eyes shut, the very picture of languid content, only opening them occasionally, to watch the smoke from his cheroot curl upwards, with all the grace it can on such a lazy afternoon, and then shutting them again with an expression of greater contentment than before. He is enjoying the *dolce far niente*,

poor fellow, of which he knows so little. Surely, to enjoy, and thoroughly appreciate rest, one must have been a hard worker.

I throw myself down at his feet on the long grass that is waving gently like a summer sea, and remark now and then on the beauty and grandeur that lie



spread around us. How those fleecy clouds hang lazily beneath that mountain peak, lingering on their way as if they felt it was time enough to sail when they had wind to help them along, but that to-day they meant to take life easily, like everything else. Or, See! how that cloudlet has got entangled among the branches of that tope of trees yonder, which crowns the summit of the hill, and that one there to westward, left far behind its fellows, is lying snugly in a sleepy hollow, where it intends apparently to remain. I am only answered by a good-tempered half

apologetic growl, or at most, a scarcely audible monosyllable; and he closes his eyes more firmly than before, as if to make me understand that though 'speech' may be 'silvern, silence is gold.'

Overhead the mosquitoes hover in myriads between us and the sky, but are too indolent to bite, so long as the sun shines.

'Gnats!' growls F——, in reply to my soliloquy that I fear they will attack us the very instant it sets; and throwing the end of his cigar away, he subsides into sleep.

From below comes the distant sound of voices, and I observe C——, his hands buried in the depths of his capacious pockets, talking to a little knot of guardsmen; whilst the women-kind come creeping up timidly, to have a side-long peep at him.

But shadows soon begin to lengthen, and everything betokens the gradual approach of eventide. The butterflies no longer flit from spray to spray, but go hurrying off whilst daylight lasts, in quest of 'leafy tents' beneath which to screen themselves from the heavy dews of night. C—— has finished his gossip, and gone for a stroll, and the silence is broken only by the distant crowing of a cock in the village below, or the dreamy chirp of a little bird, still hovering far up in the heavenly blue; and these only seem to add to the stillness of the hour.

Thousands of feet above, the rugged mountains are

standing out boldly against the clear sky, now fast fading from blue to tender grey. Soft arrows of light dart through the thin haze which floats between our camp and the distance, and twilight gently falls upon us, although the barely perceptible houses on the ridge of Chakoong are still basking in full sunshine,—their windows, concentrating its rays, blazing away like day-stars.

Darkness does not come on so rapidly here as in the tropics, but no sooner has the sun disappeared beneath the mountains, than everything changes as if by magic. The crimson and yellow lights die out, and nature wraps herself in a gloomy mantle of purple and cold grey. The little bird descends to his nest in rock or tree, and the villagers to their huts, now sending forth columns of smoke in the preparation of their evening meal. C—— returns from his walk, and F——, awaking with a start, is quite sure, as day sleepers always are, that he has not been asleep at all.

We all now assemble round the camp-fire, which is crackling merrily. There is a chilliness in the air, and its warmth is pleasant. When evening has quite closed in, we repair to the dining-tent, and C——, producing a ponderous volume of Kaye's 'Sepoy War,' reads aloud for the general behoof. But no sooner have we settled ourselves, than we are beset by a crowd of insects of all sorts and sizes, which come about us like the hosts of Midian. Flying ants, green locusts, the latter varying from two to three inches in length, and a supremely loathsome

creature familiarly called 'the carpenter,' but by the natives 'dene,' and others of a different kind, that look when flying like little fat men with their hands in their pockets, all make their appearance, attracted by the lamp, which they possibly mistake for an untimely moon, and come hopping, flying, crawling, as their several modes of progression prompt them. They crawl up our sleeves and down



our necks, and, ah me! flounder about in my hair, for they are no respecters of persons or things; whilst from the opposite side of the table I watch the movements of one big fellow, on the light fantastic toe, pirouetting before me continually, as

though he were performing for my especial amusement. By its side is an insect of the graver sort, a praying mantis (*Mantis religiosa*)—if anything of such gigantic proportions can reasonably be called an insect, whose body, not counting its horns, is three inches long if it is one; nor do I exaggerate, for has not F—— many of them as large, and larger too, in his cabinet at home? but IMPALED, thank heavens! their bodies safely stuffed with cotton wool.

The above signification is given to this insect on account of the curious position it assumes. Raising the two front legs, or rather *arms*, it elevates its long thorax likewise, and moves the head from side to side in a continuous see-saw motion. It is very amusing to watch

from a respectful distance, and all are doubtless alike charming to the entomologist; but I, at any rate, have not come out to study natural history under this form, and matters growing worse as their numbers increase, we are obliged at last to take refuge in the darkness of our own tent. But our troubles even here are not altogether at an end, for we are followed by mosquitoes, which attack us unmercifully. Having been residents of the mountains for so long a time, we are quite unaccustomed to these little bloodthirsty tormentors of the lower elevations; but I console F—— by saying they are only the 'gnats' which were sporting above our heads so inoffensively in the afternoon, and I fall asleep at last, wondering whether, after all, travelling in the Himalaya is so very delightful as I anticipated.



CHAPTER XIX.

THE RIMMĀM.

OPENING my tent door at peep of day, before the camp is astir, I let in the pure morning air. The flowers are trembling under their weight of dew, and pale vapours still hang in the valleys, waiting the sun's rising to bear them upwards. Reclining within my little tabernacle, I watch it ascend behind the hill tops like a ball of fire, when the mists melt away beneath its thirsty beams, to fall again at eve, perhaps, upon some more distant valley, in nature's wondrous cycle.

It is Sunday, and breakfast over we have a short Service in the dining tent, and later in the day go down to the Rimmām, of whose beauties we had all heard so much; C—, in anticipation of our visit, having dispatched a detachment of coolies last evening, to clear the narrow pathway from jungle, with which it was completely overgrown. Starting at 3 P.M.—I in my dandy, and the gentlemen walking—we descend for a considerable distance through a copse, till we come to the ridge of a mountain, which stretches along for half a mile, and separates the valley of the Rimmām from that of the

Chota Rungheet. So narrow is this ridge, that we can see the valleys, two thousand feet below, on either side, without changing our position in the least.

Though that to the left, the broad Rimmām is seen, wending its way over its rough bed of 'gneiss,' to swell the waters of the Great Rungheet, and flowing onwards with a dignified and subdued roar, as though it felt it had a duty to perform, and meant to do it conscientiously. To the right winds the Chota Rungheet, an offspring, I believe, of the river of the same name, which I described in a former chapter. How it bubbles and frets itself into waves, shuffling along in a fussy and consequential manner, as most small things do, not only covering its banks with foam, but dodging in and out, and forcing its way into nooks and corners, where it would seem to have no business whatever; sometimes rushing into the very heart of the forest, and creating little islands of solitary trees; then again forming the letter S in its gambols, and flirting with the stones on its margin, coquetting like a young thing that never knows its own mind! And what a noise it makes in its onward progress; till, fairly tired out, it sleeps in the forest awhile where the shade is thickest, but only to show itself again further on in the distance, as sportive and restless as before!

The trunks of the sol trees here are covered with epiphytcal ferns, whose fronds, extremely rigid, measure four or five feet in length. Each tree is encircled by

several of these singular coronets, which from a distance have all the appearance of gigantic shuttlecocks.

At length we follow the extreme edge of a rocky precipice, and the path becomes very dangerous; but soon after this we reach the white banks of the Rimmām, where tall trees, rich in foliage and flowering climbers, are growing in tangled masses close to its margin.

The river winds through a narrow gorge, and the surroundings are wild and beautiful in the extreme, grandeur alternating with the picturesque; for the mountains, although very precipitous, are clothed with magnificent forest, whose exquisite gradation of green baffles all description, relieved, where relief necessary, by large boulders of brown 'gneiss' which project everywhere; whilst a peak, twelve thousand feet high, dominates and seems to sentinel the whole. But time is on the wing, and we have to turn our backs upon all this beauty almost as soon as we behold it, for our return cannot occupy less than two hours. Casting therefore one lingering glance around, to impress the scene if possible more deeply on the memory, I resume my seat in my dandy, and we wend our way slowly upwards to our encampment, which we reach in the twilight.

The first objects that arrest our attention are our three ponies, which the syces had brought across during the day, the torrent having subsided. Greatly to our surprise, too, we find an addition to our camp in the person of a young Bhootia woman, the wife of one of my bearers.

Fanchyng—that was not quite her name, but it is as nearly like it as I could ascertain, and is the one by which she will be known hereafter—would be good-looking but for the flatness of her face. Her dress, however, like that of all her race, is pretty, with plenty of colour in



it, so that she makes by no means an unpleasing picture in the landscape.

The morning was lovely on which we struck tents, and set forth on our first march towards the frontier of Nepaul, where C——, hoping to combine a little official business with pleasure, expects to meet three diplomatic agents from the court of Jung Bahadoor, to inspect the boundary line between Nepaul and British territory, which has become somewhat ill-defined in consequence of the natives having destroyed the pillars, or landmarks, in search of treasure, which they imagined to have been originally buried beneath them.

The country through which we pass is highly culti-

vated, the mountain steeps, where practicable, being cut into terraces—a very favourite mode of cultivation with the Nepaulese, who are rather scientific agriculturists. Indeed, terracing is the only manner of culture possible in these mountainous districts. Our road takes us through



two pretty little villages, surrounded by hills covered with millet and bhoota, cultivated in like manner. Nothing could be more snug and peaceful than these homesteads, the women, as usual, models of industry, either spinning or weaving bright-coloured fabrics in their triangular

looms. Work of every kind, however, is suspended as we arrive. They descend from their huts and surround our people, asking the news—for have they not come from the big world, and are they not citizens of that great Babylon, Darjeeling?

The mothers, too, hold up their children for our inspection, which they here carry in 'sarees,' slung round the neck; whilst their little heads dangling outside sway backwards and forwards in a way that would soon make jelly of the brains of an English child. When a little older they are carried upon the hip, and it is amusing to see how the tiny creatures hold on, even when the mother's arms are both occupied. She merely gives them a maternal shove, now and again, as she trips along, holding a basket on her head with one hand and a 'lota' in the other, and they cling to her side like monkeys.

In the centre of each village we observed a cluster of many-coloured flags suspended on long bamboo poles, indicating the existence of a temple consecrated to their Deity; the temple itself being a building with two or three roofs, thatched like the surrounding huts, but each roof becoming smaller as it approaches the top, after the manner of a pagoda; whilst the flags were covered with writings in an unknown tongue, containing portions of the Hindoo scriptures translated into Thibetan or Nepalese.

Close to our path was a shed, in which an old man, contrary to all custom, was grinding alone at the

conventional mill—that operation being confined all over India, as in olden times, to women. The old patriarch, as he ground away, kept shaking his head perpetually; perhaps he was afflicted with the palsy, but, under the circumstances, it gave one the idea that he was moralising on the gossiping propensities of women.

Our climb over, we find ourselves on an open moor, surrounded by blue and rugged mountains, and see the men of our camp, in 'pictorial rags' and single file, hurrying on before us—a procession which extends for fully half a mile.

We reach camping ground at five o'clock, and having made a considerable ascent the greater part of the way, are once more in sight of the Snows, which we were unable to see at Goke, but which greeted us like old friends the moment we reached the top of the hill, or rather mountain, for we are again at an altitude of six thousand feet.

Below, in a pretty hollow, our tents are pitched, in readiness for our arrival; and at seven o'clock we dine. After dinner, great progress is made in the 'Sepoy War,' insect life being less abundant than at our last place of encampment; but although this is the case, we have a new sensation in the shape of frogs. Really in these days our experiences remind one of the seven plagues of Egypt. They do not enter our tents, happily, but congregate outside in myriads, the sound they produce being precisely that of an infinite number of policemen's rattles.

As the chirp of the grasshopper is united with it, the din becomes almost unbearable ; and one feels persuaded, from the deafening noise they make, that there cannot be a single inch of ground for many miles that does not possess its own particular frog and its own peculiar grasshopper. Occasionally all stop, without any apparent rhyme or reason, when the silence becomes almost painful, the ear having grown accustomed to the sound. Then suddenly, as if by word of command, all begin again ; and so on till dawn appears, when the chorus gradually subsides.



CHAPTER XX.

THE LAST SWEET THING IN BOOTS.

THE next thing which strikes a person unaccustomed to tent life, is the way each article of furniture has of adapting and accommodating itself to its circumstances. Tables, never suspected of having joints, fold into such a wonderfully small compass, that one could almost carry them in one's pocket; couches double up like chess-boards, lamps take to pieces and fit into boxes, which look utterly incapable of containing them. In short, nothing retains its own individuality, but becomes for the nonce something else which it never was intended to be.

Folding tents at ten o'clock, we make for Mount Tongloo, our first halting place on the Singaleelah Range. As we approach it, the sides of the mountains become better wooded; and after an hour's march through blazing sunshine, we enter a forest, and a steep climb is before us.

To those who have never witnessed the marvellous luxuriance, beauty, and picturesqueness of the primeval forests of the Himalaya, any faithful description must seem an exaggeration, where trees, in every stage of youth,

maturity, and slow decay, have been left since the creation to germinate, and grow, and wither, and die, wholly untouched by the hand of man. Here and there stand dead trees: who shall venture to conjecture even, how many centuries they have been thus standing? Their hollow trunks not only form the home of the wild deer, but furnish a covert for the more tender kinds of ferns and orchids, which, like sentient things, have sought shelter within them from the wind and weather. Fallen trees lie everywhere, and these are hidden, except in form, by lycopodia of emerald green, with which the ground is carpeted more than ankle deep. And when I speak of lycopodia, do not picture to your imagination the fragile, stunted, and effete productions you see in greenhouses in England, but rigid masses of vegetation stretching out their broad fans, and covering everything with a garment of living luscious green. In other places the ground is taken possession of by the stag moss (thus named from its keen resemblance to antlers), which trails along the ground whole yards in length. Climbers of rich amber, and red, and green, wave like banners overhead, and nature revels in every variety of form and colour. The sun, as if jealous of exclusion from this fair Eden, struggles to gain entrance, and glinting sideways through the thick foliage, dapples all things far and near with patches of golden light.

We halt here to give our ponies rest—I, too, have ridden to-day; and throwing ourselves on nature's carpet,

we watch the fire being kindled, and the water boiled for tea, than which nothing is half so refreshing or invigorating to travellers in these regions, no matter what may be the time of day ; whilst the smoke curling upwards, the red glow of the fire, the bright-robed figures sitting round it, some smoking, and some chatting, make a marvellously picturesque scene, and create a perfect festival



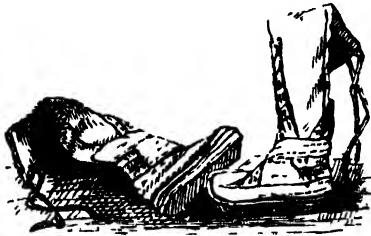
of colour. Then the baggage coolies overtake us, clothed in their parti-coloured garments of red, brown, purple, and orange, of which some portion of their dress is always composed, contrasting wonderfully with the prevailing green around. Our shepherd too passes us, heading a little procession of quadrupeds, whose destiny is mutton ; also a cow and calf, which, slowly following, nibble the succulent herbage as they go along. Sometimes the tired coolies may be seen resting their loads, without removing them from their shoulders, by placing the strong staff which each one carries for the purpose, beneath the load to support it, thus taking the weight off himself. Indeed, wherever one looks there is a subject for a picture. But the longest, and, as our people assure us, the most difficult, part of our march lies before us ; so, gathering up travelling bags and shouting for ponies, we are again under weigh.

Proceeding onwards by a gradual ascent, we enter

what in these mountains is termed a 'dripping forest,' for at some elevations cloud and vapour, almost perpetually driving through them, hang about the tops of the trees, and cause them to drip with moisture. In such forests, *transparent* ferns of various kinds grow epiphytically, the trunks and branches of the trees being literally hidden in some instances by these 'children of the mist.' They are as transparent as tissue paper, and of an exceedingly dark but vivid green, and of the innumerable lovely things which nature has lavished upon this highly favoured land, they are, I think, the loveliest of all.

After a short time the path becomes so exceedingly steep, that progress is by no means easy, and, a little further still, an almost perpendicular ascent awaits us. Trees are growing upon it, but their roots are so exposed from the washing away of the earth during the rains, that it is a marvel how they manage to maintain any hold on the soil at all. Here we leave our ponies, which appear to have almost more than they can do to scramble up themselves. The poor little beasts have already been on their knees so often, as the loose stones and earth gave way beneath their feet, that even had it been less steep, we should have preferred our alpenstocks. The task of climbing had been rendered comparatively easy, as far as I was concerned, by F——, who before our departure conceived the very original idea of my wearing 'mocassins,' not only as being warm and comfortable to the feet, but also as an assistance in

climbing. These mocassins are of Bhootia manufacture, and made of different pieces of coloured cloth, firmly stitched together in grotesque patterns, the soles, which are half an inch thick, being of closely knitted twine. The Bhootias, except when very poor, invariably wear these articles of attire; and very great was the general amusement on starting this morning, to behold the '*mem sahib*' thus equipped for the climb.



Having been made expressly for me, they are very magnificent in the matter of device and colour; but, I pray you! look at the sweet expression of the ankle, from a side view, and tell me whether the bare fact of my ever consenting to wear them at all, does not manifest a total absence of female vanity, and a perfect indifference to external appearances. I must confess, however, that I get on famously with them, although I am obliged to climb on hands and knees in some places, where there are no roots, or branches of trees, to hold out friendly hands to help one up. As one stops to breathe occasionally, how singular it is to look above and below, and watch the coolies, with their picturesque baskets, toiling upwards, but shouting with laughter, for these simple mountaineers are always merry and light-hearted, and nothing daunted by fatigue.

Nearing the summit of the mountain, we are greeted

by the welcome sound of the hammering of tent-pegs into the ground, which assures us that we cannot be far from encampment. A little further climb, and we see our tents being pitched, and, quite as welcome a sight to mountaineers—for these bracing breezes are sadly provocative of hunger—the evening repast once more in course of preparation.

It is wonderful in how short a time all is quiet and repose in camp ; but unless we are fortunate enough to arrive after tents are pitched, the scene seems one of hopeless confusion. Some seventy men may be seen tearing about in all directions like maniacs—some hurrying off to fetch water ; some cutting down wood for fires ; others clearing the ground for the tents, the whole operation accompanied by a tremendous hubbub and confusion of tongues. There is a perfect chorus of shouts and yells ; and as these nomad races, belonging to the southern class of the Turanian family, have each a separate language of their own, the Babel can be easily imagined. Neither do these Arabs 'fold up their tents and silently steal away,' for the breaking up of camp is an equally noisy process. But in an almost incredibly short space of time after reaching encampment, tents are not only pitched, but furnished ; the little striped 'dhurries,' or carpets, are laid down, stoves lighted—for we are now at an altitude where fires are necessary—kettles boiling over them, and everything wearing as snug an appearance as possible.

On starting, we were told we should reach Mount

Tongloo to-day, but instead of this, we now learn that it is still fully ten miles distant, and we are encamped in forest so dense and impenetrable, that not a glimpse of sky can be seen. As soon as evening approaches, but long before it has fairly set in, we are consequently surrounded by Cimmerian darkness. We dine by lamplight, and then sit outside, watching the gleaming of the camp fires throughout the forest, which they illumine far and near. Mysterious figures, looking black and weird against the red light, flit to and fro, now appearing, now disappearing into the darkness again, like demons of the glade. We count no fewer than seventeen of these fires, exclusive of the one round which we are sitting, and the effect of the whole is more wild and witch-like than I can find words to describe.

In another hour the whole camp has assumed an attitude of repose, and everyone lies stretched at full length upon the ground. Time passes as we sit tranquilly discoursing, till the only sound that breaks the stillness is that of the subdued voices of those who are not yet slumbering, and the cracking of the wood as it slowly burns away.

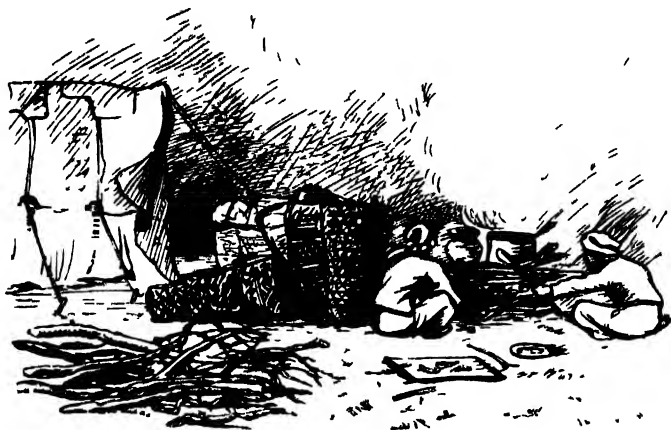
CHAPTER XXI.

A GLIMPSE OF THE 'CELESTIAL CITY.'

THE following morning at the usual hour we struck tents and began our march, singing Mendelssohn's 'Farewell to the Forest,' and after two hours' further climb were glad to find ourselves in the open, where we could once more breathe freely. Coming to a narrow but well-trodden pathway, which we had to follow for some considerable distance, we were led to conjecture that we must be approaching some village; nor were we wrong, for, crossing a deliciously clear mountain stream on our ponies, we entered a 'sacred grove.' Here we were met by a motley group of women, apparently in holiday attire. They had probably seen our approach from a distance, or been informed of it by C——'s advanced guard of sappers, as we call them—coolies who invariably precede us by some hours, to cut down jungle, clear paths, or make them where none exist, the latter being generally the case.

A 'sacred grove' is nothing more or less than a piece of primeval forest left undisturbed, usually standing in an open space, to which pilgrimages are made, and which we desecrate, not only by halting in it, but by

ordering the immediate preparation of a very substantial 'tiffin.' Then, feeling in a more genial frame of mind, I walk along to the women, who are watching us with much curiosity from some little distance, and through Narboo, an interpreter whom C—— has brought in his retinue, I am able to some extent to exchange civilities.



At first I can get nothing out of them, one and all covering their faces shyly with their 'sarees;' but when I have proved myself tame by the sacrifice of a few silver coins, they become more communicative, and, approaching closely, proceed to make a minute examination of my dress; upon which I request them to show me their jewellery, these daughters of Eve being heavily laden with massive silver ornaments, in the shape of bangles, ear-rings, anklets, and *ceintures* round the neck and

waist, from which the usual amulets are suspended, containing sacred relics. 'Fine feathers' do not make 'fine birds' in this instance, however, for the women themselves are exceedingly ugly, far more so than usual, having strongly marked Tartar features.

F—— and C—— now join me, and, standing in their helmets in the centre of the group, they look like Christian and Faithful in 'Vanity Fair.'

Leaving the 'sacred grove' behind, we presently reach the region of 'hill bamboo,' a small species, the canes of which are scarcely more than an inch in diameter. Wherever the eye wanders no other tree is visible; and we have very soon to make our way through a forest of it, the narrow path being damp and slushy with black mud, as the sun's rays never penetrate the thick mass of feathery foliage, which forms a perfect arch above our heads. In some places the path is so entirely choked with the wilderness of straight stems, that we cannot see a yard before us, and the whole is dark and vault-like, each cane being covered with a damp moss, whilst the atmosphere itself is saturated with moisture. Not a bird or insect seems to live within it, and the only sound that greets us is the crashing and cracking of the canes, as we fight our way along. On this occasion I take care to make my bearers keep well up with the gentlemen, for the gloom is painfully oppressive, and I would fain not be alone. They are, of course, walking, the foliage in some places

hanging too low to admit of their passing under it on their ponies. On one or two occasions my dandy itself gets so hopelessly jammed, that those who are off duty have literally to cut the canes away before we can be released.



But all this is great fun to the merry-hearted Lepchas, who become quite uproarious in their mirth.

With our conventional English notions concerning the bearing of the lower classes to the upper, and also from our experience of the almost servile and effeminate manners of the Bengalee, it takes some little time to

accustom oneself to the familiarity of these hill men, and to their noisy behaviour towards each other in our presence ; but one soon learns to regard them as so many overgrown children, perfectly easy of control, simple-minded and gentle of heart, a people who will not shrink even from personal danger to do you a kindness.

We are all more or less affected by our surroundings ; and just as the sailor who has his 'business on the mighty waters' is, as a rule, more open to good influences, and more ready to do a kind and generous action, than other men, so these mountaineers, surrounded as they are from morn till eve by scenes of such surpassing grandeur, possess natures bold, rugged, and incapable of the meanness and cowardice often seen in the dwellers of the plains, to whom they are in almost every respect infinitely superior.

The greater number of my bearers belong to the Lepcha tribe ; but two amongst them are Bhootias, one of whom we call Hatti (elephant), on account of his great size and strength. He is unquestionably the tallest and most powerful man I ever saw ; the other is almost equally tall, but of slighter build, and to him we have given the soubriquet of Nautch-wallah (dancer). This latter fellow possesses the most exuberant and irresistible spirits, and when not engaged in carrying my dandy, beguiles the way by dancing in advance of us like Pan, or some old satyr, in the happy days of Arcadia, accompanying his gyrations with shouts and snatches of wild Thibetan song.

Though a Bhootia, he has much more of the merry Lepcha in his composition than is usual in his class. He possesses their twinkling, laughing eye, and their keen sense of the ludicrous, and had cut a hole in the top of his conical Chinese cap, evidently for the sole purpose of



*Nautch. wallah
in repose*

enabling his hair, which he wears in a knot, to pass through it, and add to his otherwise grotesque appearance.

There are also two Lepchas amongst my bearers in whom I take especial interest. The former, a poor half-witted creature, we call Tatters, and they themselves Pugla-wallah (fool); the other, a pretty, effeminate-looking little man, with large contemplative eyes like a Brahmin cow, I have surnamed Rags, as his own name is utterly unpronounceable.

Most of their names, however, are pretty much alike, which is exceedingly puzzling and perplexing, as nearly all of them end in 'oo.' Thus we have already in our camp Atchoo, and Googoo, and Joojoo, and Fanchoo, and Jumnoo, and Nimboo, and Narboo, and Cato, and Kidderoo, and any other number of 'oos' you please.

By this time I have discovered that the having bearers of different heights is a wise arrangement in these undulating wilds, for, when ascending, the short men invariably carry the front pole, and the tall ones the

hinder, and *vice versa*, changing positions as circumstances require, so that, except in very steep gradients, my dandy is seldom very much out of the horizontal.

Still ascending, we come into the region of rhododendron trees of enormous size. Travelling at this time of year, we unfortunately lose most of the forest flowers, both the magnolia and rhododendron blooming in April ; but we pass many *daphne*, or 'paper' trees, as they are proverbially called, and these at some elevations greet us with their luscious perfume even before we approach them. The Nepalese manufacture paper very extensively from this tree, an art which was well known amongst the Ancients, who produced it from the *liber*, or inner bark, of trees.

And now at last we reach the summit of Mount Tongloo, and descry our encampment a little beneath it on the other side.

What a pretty scene it is to look down upon, that busy, hurrying hive!—the spot they have chosen being a little hollow, that seems to have been scooped out of the mountain by some giant hand. The ground is covered with long grass, which, together with the higher ridges, is studded with the blossoms of the *immortelle*, its little white flowers, and scarcely less white leaves, giving to everything the appearance of hoar-frost.

At this elevation—10,000 feet above sea level—we naturally expect wondrous views of mountain and vale ;

but to the north all is hidden in mist, whilst from the west we are completely shut out by the still greater heights of Nepaul. Nothing daunted, however, we all set off, after a short rest, to ascend them, and soon find ourselves standing upon the frontier of that country, overlooking its 'Terai'—the almost boundless plains.

We had ascended the heights in a westerly direction, and were struck speechless when, on turning round, we beheld a scene described by one who has visited the four quarters of the globe as 'unequalled in grandeur and magnificence in the whole world of God's creation,' the stupendous pile of snow seeming within a day's march.

In one long line, stretching away as far as eye can reach, peak rises above peak in 'spotless procession.' In the centre, as if guardian of the whole, Kinchinjunga, with a dignity not of earth, rears its glittering crest, extending upwards, till there seems to be no separate earth or heaven, but both are joined in one. Flanking it on either side are peaks of somewhat lesser magnitude; to the right, Pundeem, its stately and almost *severe* form crossing diagonally the vast glacial valley of Kinchin. Further still to the right, rises the graceful and delicate outline of Nursyng, its jagged pinnacles, one above another, looking like giant steps, all culminating in the needle-like point that forms its summit.

To the left, or westward, the massive Kubra rears its

head, 24,000 feet in height, and Jumnoo 20,000, dominating numerous smaller peaks at its base. Beyond these, really forming one unbroken line, although hidden from this spot by the pine-clad summits of the Singalelah range, are the snowy peaks of Nepaul, the loftiest of which, Mount Everest, 29,000 feet, is the highest mountain in the world; Kinchinjunga, exceeding 28,000 feet, being the next in rank.¹

Nearer, are the mountains of the Sub-Himalaya, Pemionchi, Powhenny, Hee, and others, rising in 'wavy curvature.' Beneath these flow torrents over *débris* hurled from the heights above.

Far away eastward, in the soft distance, hidden by mist but a few minutes ago, but now exposed to view, as though some magic hand had withdrawn the veil, heave the delicately lovely snows of Thibet, the most conspicuous of which, and certainly the most singular in form of the whole vast region of peaks, is Chumalari, 23,900 feet.

Below the line of perpetual congelation are deep chasms—gashes in the solid rock, caused either by water-courses of melted snow, wearing it away in successive ages; or by the rending force of earthquakes, which are frequently felt even at Darjeeling, many houses bearing marks of their violence in cracks several inches wide, which

¹ Almost every map has a different spelling for this latter mountain. It is occasionally spelt Kanchanjanga, Kunchinjunga, and Kinchinjinga; but I have adhered to the local pronunciation and spelling of the word.

in some instances have severed the walls from top to bottom. Two years ago, in consequence of a severe shock of one of these terrible convulsions of nature, the church fell. A year later, the outer wall of one of the strongest houses in the station, the private residence of the Head-Master of St. Paul's School, was levelled to the ground from the effects of a previous shock, for about this time we were visited by a succession of earthquakes, no less than five occurring within the space of two months.

Whilst gazing on the snowy world around us, an indescribable something creeps over the scene—a something one feels, rather than actually sees—a kind of palpable silence.

It is the moment of the sun's farewell: he has this instant sunk below the highest peak, and Earth begins to mourn his departure. For one brief period colour fades; then, gathering up her forces, she speeds him on his way with high festival of gorgeous colour, and the whole becomes one shimmering sea of crystal, in which are golden cities, with towers of jasper and onyx, and shining fortresses, and minarets, and 'many mansions;' and I felt as though, like Christian standing on the Dlectable Mountains, I saw the vision of the Celestial City. Far beneath, the rocky billows upon which less snow is lying, are wrapt in every soft gradation of bronze and crimson, gradually melting into violet; thence into dark blue, till deeper, deeper still, the saddened

earth, mourning in secret, clothes herself in a sombre garb of grey, and all colour is lost in the dark and silent valleys, where a belt of white vapour shrouds the rivers as they flow.

We stood entranced, none of us breaking silence, our feelings too deep for utterance. As we watched the opal lights die out, one by one, that solemn, death-like pallor crept over them, which only those who have seen the sun set on perpetually snow-clad mountains, or stood in a chamber visited by the 'beckoning angel,' just when the soul has passed away, can imagine. I shudder involuntarily, for we seem surrounded by a pale world of death, and we all now turn away, glad to hear our own voices and view other scenes.

Walking to the verge of the plateau, southwards, we look down upon the plains of Nepaul, stretching away into the very sky, for a miasmatic mist is lying like a quivering belt along the horizon, and both are softly blended into one.

Broad shining rivers—like fairy streamlets at this distance—intersect the whole expanse, and wind away till they too are lost in the misty horizon, now growing colder and more dim in the fast-increasing twilight, and everything is exquisitely soft and dreamy. Pale stars, too, begin to steal out timidly, as though they were not quite sure it is time to shine, or as if dazzled by the long red streak of remaining day which still lingers in the western sky.

Then through the sweet evening stillness the murmur of distant voices reaches us from our camp, and for once we turn a deaf ear to the announcement, soon made, that dinner awaits our return. Hungry, as, alas! we always are, we actually tarried to worship, till a chilliness creeping over us compelled us to descend.

Dinner ended, F—— goes out to smoke his cheroot over the fire, which is burning merrily close to the dining-tent; and C—— follows him, not in his 'vicious' habit, however, for he is no smoker, but to prolong an argument they got into whilst sitting over their wine; and I wander about the camp like an unquiet ghost. Presently the moon glides up behind the rhododendron trees; and feeling sure I shall not be missed if I climb the heights once more, to see how all looks by moonlight, I summon Fanchyng, to whose ministrations I had some days ago committed myself, and who bids fair, with a slight amount of teaching, to become a rough but useful ayah; and off we start, as free as air, never thinking of such unpleasant possibilities as *bears*, which I believe do occasionally roam the mountains' at this elevation, for in these days I knew no fear.

The stars are wide awake by this time, and, notwithstanding the moon's rivalry, shining like diamonds in the sapphire heavens. But the snows, as I feared would be the case, are entirely hidden by the white vapour which we had observed lying far down the valleys earlier in the evening, and which was now hanging in spectral and



THE PLAINS OF NEPAUL.

shadowy masses about the peaks ; while the moon, throwing a shower of silver over objects far and near, and illuminating rock, and bush, and tree, casts shadows deep and mysterious everywhere.

What a change had come over the spirit of the scene since I first beheld it ! Colour is truly music to the eye, yet moonlight has a language all its own, speaking to the heart with a more peaceful and refined utterance. It is the sadder music of the minor tone, inexpressibly tender, calling up higher thoughts, and purer aspirations than merry, laughing sunshine ever can.

Walking over the crisp sward for it is freezing hard — I recall to memory a Greek poem F—— once read and translated for me, about ' Holy Night ; ' and reaching the edge of the plateau, with Fanchyng by my side, I find myself looking again over the broad expanse of plains now vague and indistinct as dream-land. The rivers threading their silent way like bands of silver, are, but just visible, whilst the nearer mountains of Nepaul rising out of the plains, being covered with a thin veil of atmosphere, seem hovering between earth and sky.

Fearing that my absence would be discovered if I delayed longer, and that F—— might be thrown into a state of alarm in consequence, we hastily retrace our steps, treading down at every foot-fall the little white blossoms* of *immortelle*, which, glistening beneath their crystals of hoar-frost, look like myriads of tiny asteroids.

I find on reaching camp that my absence has not

been discovered. Both F—— and C—— are still sitting where I left them ; and, F——'s cigar finished, they have muffled themselves up in rugs and shawls, in such strange gipsy-like fashion, that, as they lean over the fire in eager confab, their dark figures have a curiously weird effect, needing only a cauldron to make them the personification of the witches in Macbeth.



As I entered the tent, and took up a book to beguile the time, something fell to the ground that had been lying between its pages, but which I had until that instant even forgotten I possessed. It was a withered flower, given me by old Gwallah, one of which she said she always carried about her as a charm, there being some tradition connected with Budh concerning the kind of tree upon

which it grew. It was only a flower; but it looked so cold, and lifeless, and sad, that it sent a shudder thrilling through me, as such things sometimes will, recalling to my recollection Lattoo, whom I had strangely forgotten of late, amidst the perpetually changeful scenes and daily incidents of travel.

The morning on which we were to leave Darjeeling, I had gone down to wish a friend good-bye, and was slowly returning homewards, stopping to take breath occasionally, for the path was steep, or turning back to look upon the scene below, which was ever new to me—the houses of the residents crowning the mountain summits, or dotting their slopes, with the peaceful valleys lying at their feet—when some one tapped me on the shoulder.

‘How you frightened me, Gwallah!’ I exclaimed. ‘You shouldn’t come suddenly upon one in that way.’

‘The mem sahib is going away,’ she replied mysteriously, ‘and things are not well down there,’ pointing in the direction of the distant valley where Lattoo had her home. ‘I scold and scold, and call her *sustī* and *bud-mash* (idle and wicked); but I would not lose my girl, mem sahib, for all that. I would not lose my girl,’ she added, with faltering voice; and then, continuing almost in a whisper—for the tears were falling fast:

‘What good would this poor life be without her? Haven’t I seen her grow up before me; ay, and her mother too, ever since she was that high?’

‘Well, but what is going to happen to Lattoo?’ I inquired.

‘The mem sahib hasn’t noticed, then, how pale and thin she’s been growing of late? She’s sickening with a *bīmāri*, of which her mother died, that’s all.’

‘Nonsense, Gwallah. There isn’t much the matter with Lattoo; why, I saw her only two evenings ago.’

‘What I say is true, mem sahib. Last night I killed a moorghee, and the blood trickled this way and that way, and then met together *there*’—describing a circle in the soil with her stick—‘and that means—’

‘Hush!’ I said; for I knew what she was going to say. ‘What a people you are for omens!’¹

‘But there *are* tokens, mem sahib, that never deceive.’

I was in a hurry, and could not talk with her longer; so, as I wished her ‘good-bye,’ she took from her bosom this withered flower. Her words awakened a painful train of thought, and I must have unconsciously placed the flower within the pages of the book which I happened to have with me.

¹ Fowls are frequently made use of by these superstitious people as mediums to forecast events; no marriage taking place without one being placed in the hands of the bride and another in that of the bridegroom. The heads of the fowls are then cut off by the priest, and the blood is caught in a banana leaf, the omens being gathered from the direction it takes, as well as from the various forms it assumes.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BENGALÉE BABOO.

TONGLOO is situated in an exceedingly exposed position, and the predictions we each expressed on retiring last evening to our respective tents, that we were going to have a 'night of it,' are fully realised. It required no ordinary courage to get up this morning when Catoo, our head-man, came shouting outside my tent, '*Mem sahib ! mem sahib ! Paunch bajā hai*' (it is five o'clock).

I thrust my nose outside the rugs, and felt an incipient chilblain take possession of it on the spot. I had requested Catoo to call me at this hour, he having previously warned me that the only chance of seeing the snowy range of Nepal—a view of which may be obtained at rather a higher elevation than we ascended yesterday—is at sunrise; and having ordered my dandy-bearers to be in attendance, I am determined to be firm with myself.

Accordingly, after 'chota hazree,'¹ and the thawing influences of a cup of tea, I venture to leave the tent, and observe the white frost lying on the ground unlike anything I ever beheld, the sward being covered with

¹ Which, literally translated, means 'little breakfast.'

a thick coating of ice. Weak nature is sorely tempted to return to the warm, snug tent again, but, disliking to appear vacillating, and fearing also that on the next occasion I might not be able to depend on the presence of my bearers, I pursue my way, feeling really strong-minded for the first time in my whole life.

The heights ascended, however, I am amply rewarded. The greater portion of the Nepaul Range is distinctly visible. Its numerous peaks stand out sheer against the cold grey sky, the only one amongst them to hide himself being Mount Everest, the configuration of whose summit, having seen it from Senshul peeping over the shoulder of the Singaleelah Range, I know too well not to recognise instantly. To describe the colouring of the rocky base of the snow-clad mountains, which forms a perpendicular precipice of many thousand feet below the line of congelation, is impossible in words; I can only convey it to the mind of an artist, by saying it is cobalt, with a little rose-madder, and a great deal of Chinese white.

On each side rise the nearer mountains of Nepaul, steep, rugged, barren; and there is a wonderful opacity in the colouring of the whole—a *chalkiness* one would call it, were it a picture—not easily accounted for, but due, I imagine, to some particular state of the atmosphere, for there is not the slightest haze hanging over them, and the air is crisp and clear. Far more impossible still would it be to describe the immeasurable continuity of snow that surrounds me, embracing fully one-third of the

horizon ; but it may be imagined perhaps, when I say that my eye is resting on two hundred miles of eternally snow-capped mountains, stretching from west to east, whilst the sense of isolation is almost oppressive, for throughout all this vast region there is not a sign of human habitation.

The sun has hardly thought of rising yet, so that each object, at this comparatively low elevation, still wears its dark and sombre garb of grey. Standing on feet from which all sensation has long ago departed—the chilblain developing rapidly under these fostering influences!—I wait till my bearers have dragged along some dead branches of the rhododendron, and made a fire, which enables me to endure the cold till the sun is up, when beneath its genial rays the frost soon melts on this upland, where there is no shade. Here I remain several hours, endeavouring to make a sketch of Kinchinjunga and its adjacent peaks ; and at ten o'clock I have a solitary picnic, my breakfast being sent up to me.

I was just putting the finishing touches to my sketch, when, looking over my shoulder, I saw travelling towards me, with extraordinary rapidity, across the plains a shadowy army of white clouds, which seemed to come out of the airy distance. These, ascending the heights, soon mingled with the miles of cloud now rising to meet them beneath the mighty snows, and in a few moments everything was enveloped in vapour ; and I beat a hasty retreat. Confined the whole live-long day within the narrow limits of our tents—for this mist continued to shut

us in, and everything else out—we strive, but I fear with very ill success, to kill time.

Not only on this day are we fog-bound, but the two following ones also, till the atmosphere gets saturated with moisture, and Nature—that is to say, as much as we can see of it—wears a washed-out, limp, and bedraggled appearance. We lift the ‘kernaughts’ (walls of the tent), and the cloud bursts in and almost blinds us. Everything one touches is clammy, and one feels oneself a sponge. If we have to stay here under these circumstances much longer, we shall see mosses, fungi, and lichens growing over our portmanteaus, and be able to pursue the study of *cryptogamous* plants before we are up in the morning.

Enter Fanchyng bringing water, looking like a dishevelled Hebe, followed by F —, who has been standing outside smoking, each hair of his moustache and whiskers crowned by its own little globule of moisture, giving him the appearance of a hoary old lichen. I verily believe, if we do not go soon, we shall take root here, and all three of us be metamorphosed into gigantic specimens of moss and fungus, or some other species of moist vegetation.

There is a great uproar in camp, too, consequent upon everybody running into everybody else, and upsetting everybody’s goods and chattels, and knocking each other down accidentally. It is fearfully cold besides, and the coolies throw about their arms like windmills, whilst we ourselves keep close under canvas, and crouch together

over the stove. Thank goodness, we are above the range of insect life, so that we can, at any rate, sit in peace in 'mine inn;' and as we converse in a somewhat desultory manner, we feed the hungry stove with the small pieces of wood that have been prepared for it. It is wonderful what a fascination even this has for idle hands, and we almost savagely grudge each other the slight occupation. But we might be worse employed after all, for we all know what that proverbial philosopher and sagacious sage of our childhood, Dr. Watts, says about 'idle hands,' and who the questionable personage is who finds 'work' for them.

Having nothing else to do, I will here introduce another of our party of whom I have not yet spoken, but who is, nevertheless, a very important personage in his way. I allude to Tendook, a native gentleman, the agent of Tcheboo Lama, a man of considerable social status in his own country, in the Rajah's confidence, and much about the Court.

Tendook had long been known to C—— in his official capacity, and on his proposing to accompany us, being himself also, as he said, anxious to visit the 'interior,' C—— fell in at once with the suggestion, knowing he would have great influence over our people, the greater number of whom are natives of the country under his rule. He brings with him a retinue of fifteen men, who swell our numbers, so that altogether, including the little 'sapper corps' of twenty men

I have often mentioned, we have now a camp of ninety souls* save one, that one being Fanchyng, who, merely a woman, is denied that spiritual and immortal principle, which the lords of the Indian creation arrogate to themselves as the privilege of man only. I am forgetting, however, that the greater number of our followers are not Mahomedans and Hindoos, who exclude women from entrance into their Elysian Fields, or accord them a very second-rate sort of Paradise at best, but are for the most part Buddhists—a fact of which I am only this moment reminded, in the erection of a little altar of loose stones covered with flags—and Buddhists, like Christians, with a benevolence and generosity far beyond our deserts, concede souls to the fair sex !

Tendook's tent, which is a very imposing one as far as outward appearance goes, being covered with stripes of blue and white cloth embroidered in Thibetan devices, is always pitched at some distance from ours, but whether from motives of respect, or dislike to too great a proximity to the 'Faringhi,' or Christian camp, we have not as yet been able to determine.

Tendook is a good-looking man, rather tall for a Lepcha, his figure 'corpulent and comfortable,' and wonderfully clean for a mountaineer, a concession made only, I imagine, out of consideration for our national prejudices. His dress usually consists of a long robe of maroon-coloured silk, which he sometimes exchanges for one of embroidered amber cloth. His head is adorned

with a small round velvet cap, beneath which dangles a very imposing pigtail, ingeniously lengthened by means of thick-spun silk, which is plaited with the hair, ending in a long tassell, till the whole reaches considerably below the waist, and, keeping time with each movement of his portly figure as he walks along, sways to and fro like the pendulum of a clock. Enough of Tendook for the present.



We have also a true specimen of the 'Bengalee baboo' in our train, a subordinate of C——'s, belonging to a class perhaps the most objectionable of all the natives of this land, whose sleek, stolid face, and large liquid, but passionless eye, and the compromise between the European dress and that of Orientals, which they generally adopt, constitute to my mind a very incongruous and disagreeable picture.

Usually educated at schools in which every branch of education, including the classics and mathematics, considered necessary for English youth is taught, they become conversant in due time with the British authors, Milton and Shakespeare being those for whom they generally affect to have a preference. Gifted with very retentive memories, they store up expressions and sentences which they find in the writings of these their favourite

authors, for the sole purpose of introducing them into ordinary conversation. They also have a way of blending Oriental and English idiom together, which is no less amusing in its results.

An example of their letter-writing, however—of which achievement they are not a little proud—will perhaps give a better idea of their mental characteristics than anything I can say. The substance of their lucubrations is not unfrequently taken, piece by piece, from books, and strung together, with a misapplication of terms that is perfectly astounding, when one remembers that they have been probably educated for years in a school where English formed the basis of their education.

The following is a letter I received from one of these baboos about a year ago :—

Honoured and Reverend Madam,

With the most confounded respect I come before you with the pen, to prostrate myself at your ladyship's footstool as a humble petitioner for your bountiful charities, and long-sufferingness. Your countenance is like the moon when she walks in brightness,¹ wherefore I do not prognosticate defeat—for the 'quality of mercy is not strained ; it droppeth like the gentle dew from heaven'—and I commit myself with confidence to your ladyship's gracious recommendations. Dear Madam, I have heard that the Postmaster-Generals a friend of yours, and I implore the appointment of postmaster of —, lately vacated by Randeem Butterchuckee ; for the present menial post of clerk I have for some years been enjoying, has so much attenuated my social position, that the very friends of my breast refuse to know me, and my daughter's nuptials have been hindered thereby. Besides which,

¹ I wonder he didn't say that my eyes were loadstars.

although, as saith the immortal bard, 'sweet are the uses of adversity,' I have often not possessed sufficient filthy lucre to provide my orphans with the grubs necessary to sustain the life.¹ I do not hesitate, your ladyship, for 'truth hath a quiet breast,' to caricature the late functionary holding the appointment I hunger for, as a pusillanimous donkey; but *humanum est errare*, and I trust, if I am so happy to succeed him, that by enlarging my phylacteries and a punctuality to business and small profits—'for the golden mind stoops not to show of dross'—I shall merit the malevolent benefaction not only of the nobility and 'tocracy, but of the general public. But as 'brevity is the soul of wit,' I will now withdraw, begging your reverend ladyship will lay this humble contrition before his excellency, the gentlemen at the top of the post-office. And as I am going to become Christān, please, ladyship, lend me fifty rupee only, and keep my being Christān *snug* (secret); and your petitioner will ever pray that the fatness of heaven may descend upon your head, and the waves of Britannia shall always rule your

Devoted servant and slave,

RAM GHOSE MUCKERJEE.

They are wonderfully quick in picking up 'slang' expressions, which they use on all occasions, pathetic or otherwise. A baboo in the employment of the Public Works Department came to me one day with rueful countenance and tear-dimmed eye—for they are a very filial people, in spite of everything—to announce the fact that the long-dreaded hour had arrived, and that on that very morning, just at half-past five o'clock, the much-respected *Bibī*, his maternal grandmother, had 'turned'

¹ Not referring, as I imagine, to a Diet of Worms, but to that which, in the polite language of modern slang, is sometimes adopted for the old and vulgar term *food*.

up her toes to the daisies !' They are also much addicted to introducing Latin into their letters and conversation, and whilst quoting their favourite Shakespcare, not unfrequently utterly pervert his meaning. Thus a subordinate of F——'s, writing on one occasion to condole with him on my being obliged to return to England in consequence of ill-health, began in this wise :—

'All the world's a stage' (by which I suppose he meant perpetually moving on, like a stage coach). 'Nothing, Sir, can really be said to be in a state of quo' (*in statu quo*) ; and finished up with the very consoling and novel information that 'All flesh is grass, and hastening to the tombs.'

The baboo we have with us is no exception to his class. If you remark on the beauty of the scenery around, he will quote from some poet, and tell you that 'To look on noble things makes noble,' or something of that kind. On the march he may be seen wending his way along perfectly alone, taking no notice either of things animate or things inanimate. A smile never by any chance lights up his features ; densest fog and merriest sunshine affect him alike, and he looks so utterly wretched and miserable, with such a settled and hopeless melancholy written in every line of his face, that F—— declares it makes him feel inclined to cut his *own* throat even to look at him.

We all long for the fog to clear and enable us to journey on again ; our idle folk meanwhile sit gambling round their fires, or stand about in knots talk-

ing. It is amusing to watch Fanchyng amongst a group of Bhootias and Lepchas, or more frequently with the kitmutgars, and listen now to her merry ringing laugh, now to her shrill angry tones as something is said which annoys her. Fanchyng was not beautiful, as I have said, but she was a bright and bonny lass, possessing, through the combined influence of art and keen mountain breezes, the rosiest of cheeks, and the kitmutgars and plainsmen liked well enough to talk to her; but woe to him who spoke in a too familiar tone, or touched her with but the tip of his finger. As a Bhootia, she had twice their muscle and physique, and I would not have answered for the consequences.

Small things are an event to us whilst fog-bound here, and a chowkeydar arriving from Darjeeling this morning with bread and other small things produced quite a sensation. It is true that the bread is more than a week old; but having been condemned to eat hard sea biscuit for three days, we regard it as an immense luxury.

It was here that C—— expected to be met by the three agents from the Court of Nepaul; but as they make no sign, he sent a messenger yesterday with a letter, reminding them of the object of his visit, and acquainting them with the fact of his actual arrival. Nothing came of it, however, and he was informed long after that they had insolently said they desired no communication with the English Government either personally or by letter. So much for our friendly relations with Nepaul!

CHAPTER XXIII.

WE ENCAMP IN A PINE FORREST.

THE fog having cleared the third morning after our arrival at Mount Tongloo, we struck tents and started on our way. Since that time a week has passed, and we have been marching regularly from twelve to fifteen miles each day. However sharp the frosts may be at night, the sun, when he deigns to shine, makes the day pleasantly warm. Journeying on in cheery companionship, we are 'merrier than marriage bells,' hardly heeding the flow of time, like children, conscious only of the happy present, with neither past to regret, nor future to dread; life's sorrows coming to us hushed, or not at all.

There is unquestionably a charm quite unique in travelling in these mountains, and a freedom inconceivable. There is no registering of one's effects, and agonising dread of mislaying the *reçu de bagage*, as in travelling on the Continent. There are no Custom-house officials to read in your face the undeniable fact that, deep-hidden in a mysterious, far-concealed pocket, there lie some dozen pairs of light kid gloves, or packets of cigars, which in a weak moment you have undertaken to pass for your hus-

band. We are haunted by no dread, as in England, every time the train draws up to a station, that at this very identical moment somebody may be standing at the door of the luggage-van, and coolly laying claim to your particular belongings.

No solemn garden parties or funereal dinners, no weary conventionalities of society, follow us here. We are children of nature. Hungry and we eat, weary and we lay us down and sleep. All kinds of pleasant incidents occur on the way, and the fatigue and rough bits of road, which, as F—— expresses it, are 'bone-wrenching' to climb, the frequent small vexations, the thousand-and-one things that will not run smoothly, are all alike forgiven and forgotten in this pure and exhilarating air; and in the lonely heart of nature, one's mind, somehow, becomes more open to tender and innocent enjoyment. The people of our camp, too, are in such an uncontrollable state of hilarity, that it is useless trying to curb them; and Nautch-wallah, going on in advance of us, indulges, every now and then, in a sort of Highland fling.

I am getting used to the battering and shaking which I hourly experience in my dandy, and my muscles are getting used to the straining. We are all becoming accustomed to our canvas homes: we do not so persistently run against the tent-poles, or risk decapitating ourselves every time we go in or out; we are learning to double up, and be compressible; we no longer knock our shins against legs of tables and other tent furniture. The

gentlemen at last know how to dispose of their feet and legs ; and we are taking so marvellously to our Arab life, notwithstanding everything, that we begin to believe we must be direct descendants of Ishmael.

We are also getting used to the candles, as they hang from our tent-poles, guttering down all night upon our hats, or any other articles of attire that may happen to be beneath ; but I cannot say that I am as yet quite used to having all about my clothes black currant jelly, a pot of which C—— benevolently gave me for a sore throat. This pot first tumbled into my open portmanteau, without my knowledge or consent, and then, in the hurry of striking tents this morning, got packed up in it, and, having been tossed about violently all day on its way hither, has saturated everything with its sticky sweetness. Neither do I *as a rule* use by way of dentifrice the arsenical powder with which F—— embalms his ornithological specimens, and which Fanchyng presented to me one morning, instead of a bottle of fragrant Odonto.

F—— is the only one of our trio who takes any rest. C——, not contented with his daily march, often sets off, on arrival at camp, for another walk, or, surrounded by despatch-boxes, sits writing for hours, having brought some of his office work with him. For myself, I sketch madly everything I see. Living day by day, and hour by hour, with the Great Mother, one acquires an affinity with her, and gets to find out her secrets. How one realises *grey* in everything, grey not only in retiring

portions, and in shade, but grey *sunlight* even, grey predominating everywhere; and I often recall to mind the works of that simple and truthful lover of nature, David Cox, with his grey daylight, and warm buff shadows. How one comprehends at last what artists mysteriously call the 'regular irregular,' and 'the lost and the found,' which perhaps mark the difference between the works of artists and amateurs, more than aught else. Becoming a pupil in this great school of Nature, one finds that her palette is furnished with very little positive colour, and that she uses it in the half-tones only; and one arrives at length at the appalling and humiliating conclusion, that her trees are *not* a combination of verdigris and boiled spinach, as one would imagine from the study of the works of some of the pre-Raphaelites, and that, therefore, many of one's own previous art efforts must be a gigantic failure!

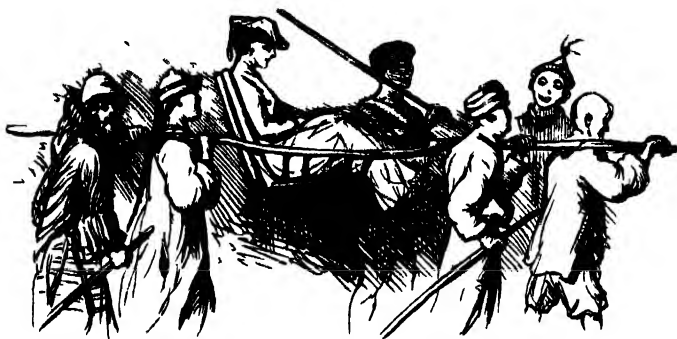
What glorious views we passed to-day, what deep valleys and blue mountains! In one place, through a rent in the rock, Kinchinjunga was seen standing alone in all the glory of its glittering sheen, beneath which were rugged hills in every exquisite shade of rose, and violet, and purple. Scattered here and there upon them were tall and ragged pines, permitted by the elements, one would imagine, to have anything but a peaceful life of it, so eccentric was their growth, so black and seared, and, above all, so singularly bare of foliage.

Following a sheep track a great part of the way, we reached a rudely constructed hut, sheltered beneath

rhododendron trees, which we conjectured must belong to a Nepaulese shepherd, grazing his flocks in more fertile pastures below ; for, at this time of the year, the herbage at these elevations is scanty and dry. A large dog guarding the hut flew out at us, and barked violently, indignantly refusing to be propitiated by a bone which one of the baggage coolies threw to him. Nor did he seem inclined to let us alone, until he had followed us to a safe distance, when, with a parting growl, he permitted us to pursue our journey unmolested.

Our march to-day was an unusually exhausting one. The higher we ascend the more difficult and uneven becomes our path, which sometimes takes us close to fearful gulfs, into which one false step on the part of my dandy-wallahs must inevitably precipitate me. At such times and places my faithful bearers, in their simple child-like way, bade me 'have no fear;' and when the path led over very dangerous places, Hatti, proud of his great strength, would insist on being one to carry me. Tendook and I, too, have become already great allies, and he usually accompanies me, directing their steps, walking by my side, in stately and dignified silence, ready to render unobtrusive help when necessary ; whilst Nautch-wallah, when not on duty, beguiles the way, as usual, by dancing more deliriously than any Satyr, and footing it in a manner that would have astonished even Pan himself ; but Hatti walks by my side, when similarly disengaged, as if he were my champion.

I have often spoken of the amiable bearing of the Lepchas not only towards Europeans, but towards each other. The Bhootias, however, and Nepaulese, some of whom are amongst C——'s and Tendook's retinue, frequently engage in small feuds, and form, in truth, two factions, with whom it is sometimes war almost to the knife. The Bhootias, as the stronger party, generally



have it all their own way, claiming pre eminence as their right, whilst the peaceful Lepchas, who are not prone to wax valiant in fight, yield to them naturally, as they would do to everybody. Not so the Nepaulese, who do so with but ill grace. There is honour amongst thieves, we are told, and there are rules of precedence even amongst these semi-barbarians. On arrival at camping-ground this evening, we were favoured with an instance of it. Some of the baggage coolies, who had done their share of work, in hauling wood, fetching

water, clearing ground, &c., having established themselves in groups in their respective quarters, were already cooking their evening meal; whilst Hatti and Nautch-wallah, who head the Bhootia faction, were still occupied in the pitching of our tents. On retiring to their own camping ground, after finishing their work, they found that the Nepaulese had taken advantage of their absence by choosing the most comfortable and convenient places for their own bivouac. Hereupon a war arose, and they fell upon each other, like rooks fighting for a bough, some of the Bhootias hurling the cooking pans of the Nepaulese and their contents into the very air. Attracted by the noise, F—— went to see what it was all about, and arriving just as the battle was won, found Hatti removing the belongings of the vanquished Nepaulese from the disputed ground; whilst Nautch-wallah, somewhat exhausted by his exertions, was calmly sitting on the recumbent form of Tatters, one of the offending party. At which proceeding F—— remonstrated, insisting on Nautch-wallah's finding some other seat.

‘Never mind him, Sahib,’ replied Nautch-wallah; ‘him all right!’ as the poor crushed fellow rose to his feet, and tried to shake himself into shape again. ‘Him pugla (foolish); I give rice, and make all right again.’

I have frequently observed, on reaching camp, that the gentle Lepchas squat down upon the ground, and wait patiently till the feudal parties have taken up their several positions, and then quietly put up with whatever

places may be left, the consequence being that they are but too often left out in the cold.

The spots considered most advantageous for bivouacking are those beneath the shelter of thick bushes, or against large boulders or overhanging rocks, which form a background. Stakes of about four or five feet long are then driven into the ground and covered with a striped dhurrie, or scarf, which they wear over their shoulders on the march; those who do not possess articles of the kind, forming little enclosures of boughs.

We were just leaving our own to proceed to the dining tent, when the oppressed Tatters presented himself before us, holding up the fragments of the earthen pot in which his rice had been cooking, and which Hatti had broken, the tears coursing down his smoke-begrimed face, creating little meanderings, like the Delta of the Nile. It was evidently a great loss to him, and one he could not make good. But F—— summoned Catoo, the deficiency was soon supplied, and the poor fellow retired to his lair, looking as happy as a child.

These hill tribes certainly suffer from chronic hydrophobia, and except when exposed to an involuntary shower-bath from a heavy down-pour of rain, are seldom acquainted with the cleansing element. What a blessing it is that Nature, meeting the exigencies of the case, causes it to rain so heavily in these mountain regions!

We are now encamped in a pine forest, and the air is filled with resinous odours, our footsteps falling noise-

lessly over a soft carpet spread by the 'autumnal sheddings of countless years.' As evening wears on, it is beautiful to watch the camp-fires gleaming through the tall straight stems, as the wind, like giant bellows, blows the flames about fitfully, and makes music amongst their branches.

The general silence already indicates that our tired people have eaten their meal and are at rest; and the sound of a gently gurgling 'hubble-bubble,' filled with a



compound of tobacco, spices, sugar, and opium, proceeding from within the cooking tent, and smoked by some contemplative Moslem, shows that he too has given himself up, body and soul, to the calm enjoyment of the hour; whilst we ourselves, reclining by the waning camp-fire, too lazy to talk, watch the wood split and fall in and then burn up again with a sudden crackle and splutter.

It is amusing to see the plainsmen—many of whom we have in our camp—smoke their evening ‘hookah.’ Squatting down upon their heels, they remain perfectly silent, too thoroughly absorbed in that delightful exercise to be conversational, or to take notice of anything that is going on around them. No sooner, however, have they exhausted its contents than, wrapping themselves tightly in their chuddahs, they are quite ready to talk to a brother about the probable state of the rice crops, or of the last arrival of pilgrims from Mecca.

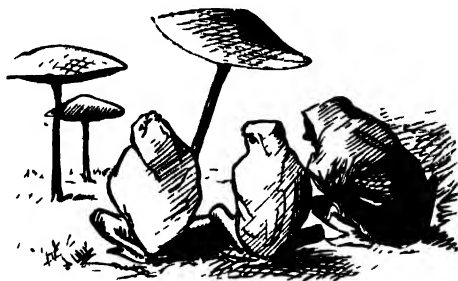
More singular and amusing still is it to see them on a showery day, in the plains where their umbrellas are made of bamboo, and do not shut, and where they may be seen squatting, with these useful articles—which are



fitted with spikes at the bottom of the handles for the purpose—stuck into the ground over or near them. At such times they look from a little distance precisely like frogs sitting beneath a species of fungus, familiarly known as ‘toad-stools.’

We are now at an elevation of eleven thousand feet, and, the cold growing intense as evening wears on, I

retire within my tent, whilst F——, smoking, keeps vigil with the moon. Reclining within the open doorway, I look out upon an exquisite framed picture of pine forest, the tall straight trunks casting long elf-like shadows, through which is seen one noble glittering spire of snow, in solitary grandeur; and I recall the events of the day, and think with a shudder of the precipices we have



passed, and the unknown dangers we have escaped, and how near we may have been to that mysterious life beyond, which awaits us all sooner or later, when the slender thread which binds us here will be loosed to let us free; a time that almost comes to us in the vicissitude of each day's travel, and would surely do so but for some restraining hand to hold us up.

CHAPTER XXIV.

PINES.

'Ye hills ' ye seem the great earth's aspirations,
The heavings of her full heart toward the skies.'

TO-DAY being Sunday, we anchor here to give our tired men a day's rest. A short service in the dining-tent—F—— reading the prayers, and C—— the lessons and psalms for the day—carries us away in thought from these scenes to those of home. It is a sweet calm day, the heavens above so blue and all around so fair. Plenty of *sermons* find we in this grand volume of Nature.

A little below our encampment, between 'wooded heights, we again catch sight of an angle of the plains, simmering in the noon-day sun, which cooks them slowly and tenderly at this season of the year, but which two or three months hence will grill them like a monster salamander, rob them of the exquisite emerald green they now wear, and 'do them brown' in no time, till they become almost as arid and barren as the desert of

Sahara. When striking straight down, it will pierce the brain like a red-hot poker, and those who live there will breathe flames, for the wind blowing in parching tornadoes, as from the mouth of an oven, will puff away its fiery blasts from 'morn till *stewy* eve.' A hot, tremulous haze, like poisoned vapour, will exhale from the earth ; a broad zone of 'prickly heat' will encircle the waists of its dwellers like a metallic brush, thickly set with finest needle-points ; and mosquitoes will make their life a burden.

Later in the afternoon we walk across to an adjacent mountain, whence we hope to gain a view of a military fort belonging to the Goorkhas, the dominant race in Nepaul. Far, far down in green hollows, here and there lie little sleepy huts, folded snugly in the bosom of the mountains, and *tucked* in, as it were, with neat enclosures of sugar-cane, which surround them like a wall.

Reaching camp just as the sun is setting, we pass Tendook's tent, where he and Narboo, the interpreter, are sitting within the doorway, like Abraham and Isaac, or some other of the Patriarchs one reads of in the Bible ; and F—— and C—— now leave me, to prolong their walk in another direction, and I, sitting over the camp-fire, feel not unhappy alone.

There is a strange hush in our usually busy hive, a kind of Sabbath stillness ; and it is on evenings like the present, when the azure is giving place to mellow saffron

lights, as the sun sinks deeper below the horizon, that the forecast steals through the mind, that we too must one day sink to rest, and that the chastened and mellow light of one's own life's evening will be but an earnest and har-binger of the glory that is to follow on the morrow.



When later still all colour fades, and these transcendent and eternal hills, with their look of indomitable energy and irresistible force, stand out stately and solemn in the subdued light, I love to muse upon them best.

Two years ago I was standing beneath the all but immortal pyramids of Gizeh ; and how my spirit stirred within me, as my eye rested upon that, which stretching down a long vista of chequered vicissitude, carried me back in thought to remote antiquity, and connected the dead past with the living present. Yet, great as are those mighty monuments, they had a genesis. Four thousand years ago they were raised block by block, and are but the handiwork of man, himself the handiwork of God ; but these lordly and eternal snows, on which no human foot has ever trodden,¹ were laid flake by flake

¹ No one has hitherto been able to ascend beyond 22,000 feet.

by the Almighty architect. Before history was, they were; and sitting here wrapped in their shadow, and encompassed by their grand and solemn silence, I feel in the living presence of the Infinite.

The following morning, rising at peep of day, we grope our way outside. The eastern sky is just tinged with the first faint glow of morning; all else is dim and indistinct. At these altitudes I have observed a kind of warm translucent light preceding sunrise, a slight forecast or herald of the approach of day. Walking some little distance over the crisp white sward, and threading our way between the pine-trees, we reach the brow of the hill, and watch this light die out, when all becomes pale and cold. Then suddenly a brilliant streak bursts over the horizon, the sun rapidly ascends, and in a few minutes the sky is bathed in a flood of rose and purple, and, like an illuminated manuscript, bears glorious witness to the resurrection, in the awakening day. Turning westwards, the snowy peaks, covered with a pink mist, look vague and dreamy still; whilst the lower mountains in the middle distance are greenish black, their summits bristling with a *chevaux-de-frise* of leafless pines, standing out boldly against the soft grey of the eastern peaks, which seem literally melting into ether.

But although the sun had indeed risen to us, in the valleys darkness reigned—a darkness like that of an eclipse—with the exception of one little spot, where that impartial benefactor that shines upon the ‘evil and the

good,' the rich and poor alike, glinting sideways through a mountain cleft, was lighting up a lonely hut, which looked like a mere bee-hive from this distance, and shedding a shower of golden warmth over the little patches of cultivation surrounding it, which had been watered by the gentle dews of night; and methought how much this slight suggestion of habitation increased the desolation of all around.



Returning to our tent, we steal silently upon the cook, who, to economise time probably, is performing the double operation of smoking his 'hubble-bubble,' and preparing *chota hazree*; and we become eye-witnesses of the cool manner in which the matutinal toast is made. This is how it was accomplished; and I need scarcely say

that we gratefully and uncomplainingly return to our biscuit for the future.

On this day's march we make a further ascent of a thousand feet, and the pine-trees begin not only to be less abundant, but to bear unmistakable marks of the rough blasts to which they are exposed at some seasons of the year. Indeed, at this elevation they are so eccentrically formed, so knock-kneed and hump-backed, that one cannot help fancying that mother Nature must have nursed them badly in their infancy, for their growth seems to have been a series of spasmodic and convulsive efforts, rather than the 'gentle process of natural development.' Not only are their limbs twisted and gnarled, but their joints are knobby, like those of rheumatic old men ; and they somehow wear a doomed and scared look, but, nevertheless, one that is quite in keeping with their surroundings.

All are covered with moss and lichen,—moss of that hardy kind which grows in thick velvety bosses, varying in hue from yellow to the deepest, richest brown, whilst in other places it is vivid green. In the dim labyrinth of these pine-woods no sound greets us, for it is tuneless of the songs of birds, there being no fowls of the air to make their nests and 'sing among the branches.' Nothing is heard but the wailing of the wind, which moans with an unutterable sadness. Wending our way steadily onwards through these grand and ancient forests, we come upon exquisite formations of

cold grey rock, which time has painted with lichen stains, and the weather pitted with deep lines and hollows, just as the faces of the old get marred and wrinkled.

Throughout the forest there is an undergrowth of the scarlet berberry, a kind similar to that which grows in England, but much smaller, and with leaves so red that, by contrast with the sombre colouring of all around, they seem to burn like live coals ; but the bracken-fronds at this elevation look frost-scared and melancholy. With their amber stems well-nigh severed by the wintry blasts, they hang their heads, and nestle together in sorry, comfortless companionship, as if to keep each other warm, making one shiver even to look at them, as we brush our way along.

Now and then, through the pine stems, bright glimpses of the snows are seen, wonderfully lustrous in their fresh powdering of crystal. How they flash and quiver ! each shining prominency casting its deep blue shadow in cleft and fissure.

Here and there we meet with patriarchal pines, and the higher we ascend the more frequently we do so. These, though destitute of foliage, are covered with a garment of lichen, in long, long, hoary tufts of greenish grey, for all the world like old men's beards, which only add to their old and weird appearance, as they struggle for dear life a little longer. Lonely and sad and very weary, they seem but to be waiting *their* turn to be laid low, their skeleton arms upraised in mute appeal to

heaven, as if uttering 'how long;' whilst others seem to have been arrested in the very act by death, and to have stiffened then and there. Oh! how I love these haggard, lonely pines

To my mind there is something inexpressibly touching in the sight of these once noble trees, upon which 'Ichabod' is now written. They look so terribly human that one cannot help feeling a kind of pity for them. I have used the word 'noble,' not so much to express their stature, as—still regarding them as almost sentient things—to describe their exalted nature, typifying as they do such stern endurance, never bending to the blast, but only lifting their branches like giant arms in silent protest, and, in their resistance, forming a striking contrast to the rhododendrons, their companions in distress, which, succumbing to the force of wind and weather, and yielding to the pressure, rest their strong sturdy trunks and branches horizontally on the very ground, being at this altitude most singular looking trees.

Although I observed rhododendrons in every stage of existence as we came along, from the tiny nursling, with its four leaflets, just emerging from the soil, to the vigorous and lusty shrub, I have not seen a young pine, and I cannot help wondering with painful interest, how the dying and the dead are replaced. There was no absence of cones, for we noticed them lying in all directions in the pine forest below, but the seeds do not appear to germinate. Is there a *cycle* in the growth of trees?

Passing many days amongst these majestic pines, one feels sad to think they are the last of their generation, and that their race must soon become extinct. One would be almost inclined to imagine, from the total absence of successors—and their keen resemblance to humanity fosters the illusion—that the brave weather-beaten old fellows, having themselves withstood so many centuries of wind and frost, had grown tired of resistance, and, despairing of things becoming more comfortable and jolly in years to come, had benevolently arrived at the determination not to perpetuate their species.

On reaching camp I mentioned this fact to C——, who had been in advance of us all day, and he told me that he too had made the same observation as he came along, and had decided to communicate it to the 'Forest Department' immediately on his return, for without the timely intervention of man these grand primeval forests will one day be extinct.

CHAPTER XXV.

'VOYAGES IN THE AIR.'

IT is surprising how soon one falls into that praiseworthy habit, commended by our forefathers, of rising early, when one is living an out-of-doors life. I now find it as difficult to remain within my tent after the first streak of dawn has appeared, as it would be at home to get up before the sun is high in the heavens. Quitting the tent at the usual hour, and observing signs of life in the blackened embers of a deserted camp-fire, I shout for Catoo to rekindle it. There is scarcely sufficient light yet to enable him to perform even this slight process; but a cup of tea is soon the result, and the camp, thus aroused, is all astir. Summoning my bearers, I start on the march before the sun has done much more than tip the pine-tops with his gilding.

In vain I urged F—— to accompany me. He is not so enthusiastic an artist as I am, and in these solitary excursions—for I generally precede the rest—I have fortunately no sense of loneliness. I have, besides, plenty of attendants with me, being accompanied not only by Fanchyng and my dandy-bearers, but by two of

C——'s chuprassees also, and a chowkeydar by way of body-guard! Tendook also invariably offers his services as an especial guard, so that I am well protected, were protection necessary. I have learnt by experience that the only time to be certain of absence of cloud is before noon, and we are passing through a country not one of whose beauties would I lose. I hope, moreover, to make a sketch to-day, and that is another inducement to struggle on through present discomfort. But *what* an effort it was to leave the warm snug tent, after having re-entered it, and go on my way with frozen hands and fingers!

I creep along below the crest of an eastern mountain, which effectually shuts out the sun. Nature wears an unutterably cold aspect, and although the ground is speckled everywhere with the brambles of the scarlet berry and the *Pyrus Americana*, gemmed with its red berries, all is alike colourless from hoar frost. But as the sun rises higher, it peeps over the ridge of the mountain, and Hatti exclaims in Hindustanee—with a pathos very touching, when I look around me, and observe the scanty covering of some of the poorest of my attendants—'Oh, mem sahib! here comes the poor man's clothing!' and rapidly ascending, it soon sheds warmth and colour upon everything, and all is joy and gladness. The pine-twigs, bending under their weight of dissolving icicles, rain upon us as we pass, and the dew-drops, sparkling in the lichen cups, melt beneath its rays. How well I recollect,

when I was a small child and believed heart and soul in fairies, thinking that these tiny cups were filled each night for them to drink from !

Having descended considerably the last hour, we come upon pines that do not bear such marks of violence. These are not only covered with tufts of pendulous lichen, but with hanging moss of richest green, draping each branch fully half a yard in length, resembling *chenille* that has been first knitted, and then unravelled. It is very curious to observe the wonderful variety of these parasites, which differ so completely at each altitude.

On the march, one of my bearers, a dapper little Lepcha named Joogoo, met with a number of roots of the lily-of-the-valley, which he dug up for me, and which I intend taking home, to propagate if possible as a souvenir. He also gathered from the trees for his own refection and delectation a species of moist fungus, which is not only wholesome but they tell me exceedingly good to eat. This little man knows the name, not only of every mountain, but of each herb by the wayside also, and sometimes gives me quite a little history of them as I go along, describing their qualities and peculiarities. It is unfortunate that, coming at this season of the year, we should miss so many of the Alpine flowers, as well as fruit, upon which the Lepchas can almost wholly subsist.

Halting soon, I unfold my easel and make a sketch of Junnoo; and in three hours' time F—— and 'the 'burra sahib,' as they all call C——, come scrambling

down the mountain side, followed by the 'tiffin coolie.' We make a point of keeping this individual closely in our wake, panic seizing us the very instant we lose sight of him; for hungry as we always are in this keen and bracing mountain air, his presence acts as a kind of counter irritant, and we are able to survive its pangs all the longer, from the knowledge that they may be assuaged at any moment. Our luncheons are 'movable feasts,' not only as to place, but time. Noon, however, is the hour at which we endeavour to halt for refecton, always supposing that we are fortunate enough to find a stream of water near us. The fire is soon lighted, and the frying-pan—the favourite cooking utensil for the march—spluttering away with its savoury contents. The repast, provided by C—— in the plenitude of his hospitality, generally consists of fried ham, moorghee, or pheasant (the latter almost daily shot on the road), varied by hermetically-sealed provisions, tea or chocolate completing the *menu*. Whilst we partake of our rustic meal, the people of our camp come straggling up; now pausing to rest, or to gather herbs to flavour their simple food at the end of the day's march, now toiling on again—but always merry.

Gathering up the fragments and pursuing our journey, we meet three very Chinese-looking men leading a flock of little fluffy sheep, evidently provided by Nature with coats to suit the exigencies of the climate. All are muzzled to prevent their grazing by the way, and getting

poisoned by the aconite plant that is growing everywhere amongst the herbage. The ponies, too, those *useless* animals—for the gentlemen were long ago obliged to relinquish them in these pathless steeps, and take permanently to their legs and alpenstocks—were similarly muzzled this morning before starting, the banks being full of it. The aconite is said to be of so deadly a nature that, if the naked feet of the natives only press its succulent leaves, they frequently swell to such an extent as to prevent them from walking. Tendook also informs me that the natives who collect its roots for sale have sometimes been known to die on their way back to Darjeeling, their flesh coming in contact with it through the open baskets in which it is conveyed; and I observe that the baggage coolies, who do not wear mocassins, pick their way carefully, so as to avoid treading on it.

We pass now through a narrow gorge, and our progress is rendered exceedingly difficult by the number of pine-trees which lie across it, precipitated from the heights. As we leave these behind, our pathway leads us up the almost dry bed of a watercourse. It is said that flies walk up glass, by means of a vacuum they create in the foot, and I should think that F—— and C—— must wish devoutly that Nature had provided them likewise with similar arrangements; for the bed of a watercourse is not such pleasant scrambling as could be desired, either for ourselves or ponies, the latter particularly, which appear to find their four legs too many for them, not to

say altogether an encumbrance, for they cannot climb over stones nearly as well as we bipeds do. It is a perfect marvel how the coolies manage to climb these places with their heavy loads without falling—a thing they do not always succeed in accomplishing, for a heavy thud, and a bump, followed by a chorus of laughter from those above and below, all announce the fact that some poor unhappy wight, having lost his balance, is sliding down the steep incline. The more prudent and wary, however, do not trust themselves to its slippery channel, but scramble over the boulders. It is a greater marvel still how the dandy wallahs manage to carry me; and perhaps the greatest of all is, how I contrive to keep in my dandy. Occasionally I am knocked against a sharp piece of rock, and nearly turned over, then by another knock in a different direction am as quickly knocked in again; but I seldom utter any word of complaint beyond *Khabardar!* (Take care!), and my poor men are cheerful and patient under all difficulties. Groans and grunts do escape them sometimes, but even these are relieved by scraps of song, with which, bidding defiance to every law of harmony, they endeavour to beguile the tedium of the way. These wild banshee strains seem quite in keeping with the scenery through which we are travelling.

Reaching the summit of the Singaleelah range, at an elevation of 12,000 feet, we pass frozen streamlets, and get beyond the region not only of pines, but of ferns also, even of the more hardy species, and are fast losing sight

of our little friend the *immortelle*. This little snow-white flower, familiar to all Alpine travellers, grows on some of the loftiest mountains of the Tyrol, and is called by the guides, *Edelweiss* (Noble white). It grows, there as here, beyond the limits of vegetation, with the exception of that of small herbaceous plants. Having travelled in its presence so long a time, we quite miss its soft white tufts ; but the deadly and unwholesome aconite takes its place, and grows more abundantly at each step as we ascend.

The sky is intensely blue, and the air so intoxicating in its freshness, that the very tea we had for breakfast on the way seems to have got into our heads, and so exhilarating is the atmosphere that one's very heart seems to throb as with new life. It is sweet to breathe and live—the mere fact of existence in itself being a delight ; and on F——remarking, *sotto voce*, that Nautch-wallah appears to be unnecessarily attentive to Fanchyng—insisting on carrying her bundle for her, and making himself agreeable in other small ways—I ask him how it is possible to *help* falling head over heels in love with everything and everybody, even with oneself, *faute de mieux*. I verily believe that a solo from a jackal, in such moments of extreme gladness, would sound 'plaintive, soothing, and not unmusical.'

From this ridge we seem literally to look down upon the clouds, and to be making 'voyages in the air.' Thick layers of vapour, many miles in extent, float immediately

below us, immersing the valleys in sombre shade, whilst we above them are in brilliant sunshine. It is beautiful to watch this wreathing vapour curve, and heave, and break up into different forms, changing each moment as it travels onwards, huge billows rolling over and over, uplifted as though by the agency of some mighty hand. Sometimes we look down as upon snow-capped mountains, sometimes into cavernous recesses, at others upon calm lakes embosomed in hills, but far more frequently upon a troubled sea. Then all dissolves, and one seems to be gazing upon some world of enchantment, as the broken heaps of cloud-rift roll onwards out of sight.

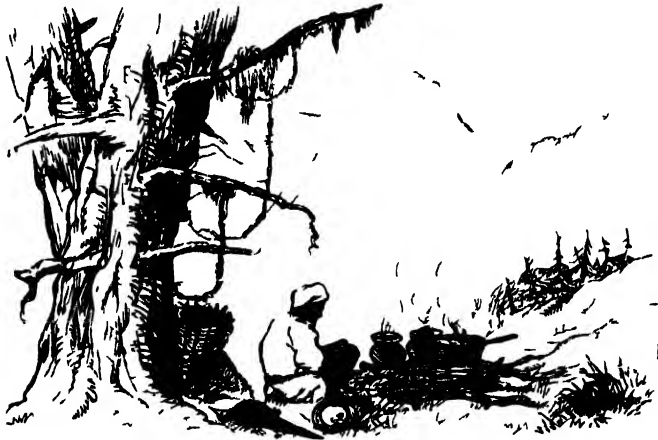
CHAPTER XXVI.

A MOONLIGHT ADVENTURE.

EARLY evening found us encamping on the summit of another mountain of this range ; and the scenery, which grows more grand and savage in its character the higher we ascend, is finer than that which we have seen from any of our previous encampments.

As we had made a quicker march than usual, notwithstanding our climb, it was still broad day when we arrived at the place chosen for us by our corps of sappers, and the sun still shone above the mountain peaks. But the baggage-coolies had not kept up so well with us ; and we had, consequently, to wait till the exciting process of tent-pitching was accomplished. Our swarthy *chef de cuisine*, however, had arrived, and was already crouching over his stew-pans, peering anxiously into them occasionally, like a wizard engaged in the preparation of some unholy philter or mystic spell. Meanwhile, after a short rest, F — and I start for a walk along the ridge of the plateau on which our camp is situated. Taking coolies with us, to cut down any bushes which might be found to impede our progress, we soon enter a belt of rhododendron trees, small and stunted here, from their exposed

position. Brushing our way through them for about a hundred yards or so, and then emerging, we find immediately in front of us a broad piece of rock, which shuts out the view completely ; but climbing it, we look down upon a deep and silent valley, and almost *over* the rocky mountains, which have hitherto hidden some thousands of feet of the base of the perpetually snow-clad range. The snows, therefore, from this point, presented an un-



usually superb *coup d'œil*, and I instantly conceived the idea of a moonlight picture, or at any rate a rough memorandum of one. Even half an hour's work would, I knew, impress the subject more deeply on my memory for working out at leisure.

Once more I did my utmost to arouse a little dormant enthusiasm in F——, to induce him to accompany me again to this spot when the moon should be

up; but, as usual, all eloquence was unavailing. He obstinately refused to undertake anything more enterprising than a cigar after dinner over the camp fire, and then, as he expressed it, to 'turn in.' But I make a small mental resolve, nevertheless, which I take care to keep to myself, not even confiding in Fanchyng, who I felt sure would be unable to keep a secret; and by the time we return to camp, tents are ready for our reception, and dinner is announced.

When we left the dining tent to retire to our own at ten o'clock, the sky was beautifully clear. It seemed not night—for the moon was at the full—but a purer and more 'divine prolongation' of the day. So clear was it that we could plainly see each bit of jutting rock, and the shadow it cast upon the most distant peak, whilst the glaciers looked spectral in the silent heavens; the tremendous precipice of Pundeem, with its dark castellated walls, standing out majestically against the vast glacial valley of Kinchinjunga. It was a sight I can never forget—that dazzling pile, upon the loftiest peak of which a faint shade of rose still lingered, as though it was dreaming of the morrow's sunrise. So glorious was it altogether that it makes me unhappy to think I cannot find words to express the beauty, the majesty, and the poetry of it; but such scenes are an expression in themselves, and are more capable of being felt than spoken. I cannot describe it; but the waste of snows stretching away as far as eye could reach, their utter loneliness, the

perfect stillness that reigned everywhere, and the desolation they presented, impressed me with a deep sense of terrible repose.

The pines, too, only added to the general desolation, for they were lying on the ground in every attitude of wild confusion. Those which had yielded to the force of the storm-king, blanched by time, lay like human bodies thrown together in a heap, as on a battle-field. Some, fallen across huge masses of rock, remained poised one upon another like mammoth skeletons, in positions where they fell—who shall say how many centuries ago?—whilst others again, left standing where they died, were now stiff and stark, and ghastly to look upon, in the ghostly moonlight. We are at an elevation now where they seem to have ceased to live, for none have the faintest vestige of foliage.

At half-past ten o'clock, peeping forth from my tent, the moon was still shining brilliantly, but clouds that almost appeared to touch me were scurrying past. The snows too were veiled by a semi-transparent mist which half hid them, so that, my ardour somewhat abating, I subsided beneath the canvas, and sat on the foot of my little camp bed reading. At length extinguishing the light, I threw myself down without undressing, and was soon fast asleep, and the moonlight and the snows and my hoped-for picture were alike forgotten. But the evening's impressions must have been strong upon me still, causing my sleep to be uneasy and intermittent, for

two hours later I awoke, and a little moonbeam was shining on my bed through a crack in the canvas. This induced me to get up to see how all was looking outside.

Noiselessly untying the flaps which enclosed the entrance, I crept out. The moon was shining so brightly that I could have read the smallest print by its aid, and the snows were positively dazzling. The sky was of that exquisite violet blue, or rather, what I think describes it better, *sapphire*, which one sees on clear moonlight nights in Italy—that land so favoured by heaven with tender beauteous skies.

Now I have no wish to make myself out to be a heroine, being on the contrary the veriest coward; never, *entre nous*, having yet been able to go into a dark room alone, or pass an open doorway at night, without seeing faces peering at me out of the darkness; but somehow I can go through a great deal for a picture.

It was the thought of a moment; I never dreamt of possibilities. Once more groping my way under the 'kernaughts,' I felt for my block and chalks, which I had prepared in readiness early in the evening, knowing that I could not use colours on this occasion, and throwing a cloak over my shoulders and a fur hood over my head, I sallied forth, closing the aperture as well as I could from the outside, and then pausing, held my breath to listen whether F—— was stirring; but no! he still breathed heavily. Passing C——'s tent, I could hear that he too was fast asleep.

I had now to make my way past the camp, under the lee of the rhododendron bushes. The fires still burnt brightly, and the poor tired fellows were lying prostrate around them, wrapped in deepest slumber, their gay-coloured gaberdines paled in the moonlight, except here and there, when a fire, gleaming forth with a sudden flash, lighted up patches of red and amber, which stood out prominently where all else was colourless.

„ No one observed me, or, if they did, probably mistook me for some erratic member of their own fraternity. Amongst the number I recognised the Herculean form of Hatti, lying with his face upwards, and I could not help thinking, as I passed close to him with stealthy footsteps, how easy it would have been to drive a nail into his head, had I been Jael the wife of Heber, and *he* Sisera !

I dared not arouse him ; to have awakened one, would have been to awaken all. Otherwise I should have done so, as I needed some one to carry my block, which, though no encumbrance to me at present, I knew would be so further on, when I should require both hands free to help myself along.

The ground, which had thawed in the vicinity of the fires, was here thickly coated with frost, which crunched beneath each footfall ; yet no one moved. Nor was there even a breath of air stirring, to bear me company as I walked onwards, and it was not long before I found myself starting at my own shadow. The very beauty of the scene made me afraid, it was all so supernatural, so

pale, so still, so passionless, so spectral. I grew cowardly, and, stopping short, I felt I could not face it alone. Retracing my steps as far as Fanchyng's sleeping-place on the outskirts of the camp, I stooped till my lips almost touched the covering of the tilt.

"Fanchyng," I whispered—"Fanchyng, I want you, —come out!"

But there was no answer, though I waited long; she was sleeping too heavily to be awakened by a call so gentle, yet I dare not speak more loudly.

At last, despising myself for my cowardice, I determined to be brave, and go on alone. I was soon under the shelter of the copse, having taken care to enter it by the way which F—— and I had previously taken together, as a pathway had already been made for me there; whilst the moon shining through the branches afforded quite sufficient light to enable me to trace it by the fallen trees, that had been cut down as we passed early in the evening. I was about halfway through, when something rose at my feet with a *whr-r-r*, which startled me greatly. I had no doubt flushed a bird, a moonāl (hill pheasant), probably. On I went, the thick rhododendron leaves through which I brushed covering me with a shower of hoar frost. Then arriving at the rock I before mentioned, which I climbed on hands and knees, throwing my block before me at every few steps, I succeeded in reaching the top.

What a spectacle now presented itself to my view!

In the valley lay a white lake of transparent mist, and rising out of it, the snows, shrouded in unearthly vapour, looked mysterious and ghost-like. To the right, rocky mountains, shattered and riven, appeared like battlements for giant soldiery, whilst to the left were the beetling crags and swelling buttresses of the Singaleelah range. Dotted about the lesser and unsnow-clad mountains, where the moonlight fell, were portions of 'mica schist,' which, sparkling brilliantly, looked like stars fallen to earth. Stars seemed not only twinkling above, but below me, and this glittering 'mica' produced the most extraordinary effect imaginable; whilst the dead pines standing with their trunks blanched, looked like phantom guardians of the whole.

It was altogether such a spectral and unearthly scene, that I realised in an instant how utterly hopeless it would be to attempt to portray it, and simply stood entranced, losing for awhile even my own individuality, feeling that I had almost entered some new world.

I do not know how long I had been standing there, when a sensation came over me as though some one behind were softly enveloping me in a wet sheet. Looking over my shoulder, I found that the rhododendron copse had vanished; the gleam of the many camp-fires was visible no longer, and the rock at my feet, with every other object, was shut out by a white ocean of mist.

.My position was by no means a dangerous one. I knew that I had only to remain quietly where I stood, till

the cloud had passed over, and all would be well, but my heart beat fast and thick notwithstanding. My limbs were getting numb and frozen, and I knew not how long I could hold out. My first impulse was to call for help, but trying to reason calmly with myself, I saw how futile that would be, for no one *could* possibly find his way through the copse in the mist, even if he tried, while I should be exposing many to the risk of falling over the ridge into the abyss beneath

As I reasoned thus with myself, the vapour grew gradually more dense, while the thickest part of the cloud passed over me, and I was surrounded by almost total darkness. A death like stillness prevailed, the only thing audible being the thumping of my own heart.

Drawing my cloak more closely round me, I struggled to be brave. After a short time the mist became thinner, shining vapour succeeded darkness, and the moon asserting its supremacy gradually shone out brightly as before, whilst a stratum of vapour which had just arisen from the valley seemed floating beneath my very feet. In stooping to pick up my block, I became conscious of the appearance of a dark shadow or figure opposite; and on standing erect, a phantom of gigantic dimensions was before me. Terribly frightened, my heart this time stopped beating altogether, and a deadly faintness crept over me. I had grown nervous and superstitious. But summoning up all my courage, which rarely forsakes me utterly in times of need, I felt sure it must be only one

of those phenomena, which I had heard of as occasionally to be met with in these altitudes.

The moon was shining obliquely *behind* me, and what I saw might be nothing more than my own shadow, greatly exaggerated, thrown upon the lake of white mist at my feet. Without tarrying to convince myself of the truth or otherwise of this hypothesis, I descended the rock as quickly as I could, and retraced my steps ; nor did I stop even to take breath till I reached the tent, when, for an instant pressing my ear to the canvas to ascertain whether F—— slept, I softly entered.

For one moment only I thought he was waking, as the open 'kernaughts' admitted a flood of light ; in addition to which I must, forsooth, catch my foot in the dhurrie, and overturn one of the baggage baskets leaning against the wall of the tent ; but he only turned over on the other side, and I could hear by his stertorous breathing that he was sleeping soundly as before.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE BLTHEL ON THE MOUNTAIN-TOP.

It was very difficult to arouse myself the next morning, when Catoo came calling me as usual with importunate voice. How heartily I wished he had been at the bottom of the Red Sea, as I lay silent, pretending not to hear ! But, tiresome man ! with him there was no remission, he only shouted more loudly than ever, ' Mem sahib ! Mem sahib ! *dary hi* (it is late),' considerably emphasising the latter word.

' You are not well, my child,' said F — tenderly, on observing my inability to move. ' I allow you to do too much ; you must have strained yourself last evening unpacking those portmanteaus. What a wretch I was to let you do it ! '

Wretch ? what a *fiend* then must I be, not to tell him all, instead of allowing him to reproach himself for my misdoings.

' Perhaps it was the straining I got in that water-course yesterday,' I replied meekly, feeling desperately guilty the while. ' Get me a cup of tea, and I shall soon be all right again.'

What would I not have given to be left in peace! I verily believe that nothing would have moved me that morning but 'conscience, that makes cowards of us all,' so afraid was I that any manifestation of fatigue should result in the oozing out of the truth, in case anyone of the camp *did* happen to see me pass. I made an effort therefore, which I think did at last constitute me a heroine for life. 'You are feverish too,' continued F——, watching me narrowly. 'Your face is quite flushed.'

At this juncture Fanchyng entered. 'Eh!' she exclaimed, elevating her flat eyebrows, and opening her funny little oblique-shaped eyes as wide as they would go. 'The mem-sahib has caught cold; she must not go on this morning, but stay behind with the sahib *logue*; and see! her head is quite hot besides'

The diagnosis was identical then; if I did not make vigorous resistance at once, between the two I should soon be converted into a downright invalid.

'There is no doubt about it,' continued F——. 'Fanchyng is quite right, there is a determination of blood to the head; I must go and consult C—— immediately.'

'For pity's sake,' I cried, catching hold of his hand as it still rested on my fevered brain, 'do nothing of the kind. I am, believe me, quite well; I had rather a bad night, that is all, and—and the fact is, I think I caught a slight chill; and if you will sit down quietly and not be angry, and promise above all not to tell C—— (for I knew if he did I should never hear the last of it, my

unsuccessful ramble would be a joke against me for ever), I'll let you know everything.'

And I did tell him all; at which he tried to look angry, but could not succeed, feeling, I rather suspect, that I had been punished enough already; and he presently promised to allow me to go on early with Fanchyng as usual.

No sooner was I up than Catoo, like a bird of ill-omen, informed me that our kitmutgar was indisposed, also two of my dandy bearers. The poor fellows get fever from exposure to the great variation of temperature, caused by the hot sun by day and the intense cold at night. This kind of fever is very common in India, but is neither infectious nor dangerous, and generally yields to quinine, of which, happily, our kind and thoughtful host has brought a good supply.

Hearing of the illness of two of my men, and not willing to tax the others too greatly, I decide upon walking part of the way, feeling much better since I arose. Fanchyng and I, therefore, with the rest of my body-guard, go on as usual, in advance of F—— and C——, who remain to see the camp broken up, and the men well on ahead with their loads; a very necessary precaution, experience having shown us that, unless they do so, the coolies often lag behind, and, instead of finding tents pitched at the end of our march, we have to sit down and shiver till they come straggling up, probably two hours after our arrival.

Although Fanchyng is not pretty, like my little Lattoo, of whom I thought so often, and wished for many a time, yet to watch her breasting the breeze as she climbed the steeps, and scrambled in and out amongst the rocks, was a fair sight to see,—her gay-coloured dress, fanned by the wind, fluttering in curves and lines that were full of natural grace and beauty. She might generally be seen walking hand-in-hand with her brother, an interloper also, ~~the~~ a 'stow-away,' who had smuggled himself into camp a few days after we started, and whom F—— now employs to carry the basket of tent pegs, as well as making him useful in various other ways.

Journeying on, we meet a man clad almost entirely in panther skins, followed by a number of little shaggy goats, whose necks are highly ornamented with tassels of scarlet wool, and bells hanging round them, their long hair trailing on the ground showing that they also have been clothed for 'moving in arctic circles.' All are laden with little pack-saddles filled with salt, procured from the salt lakes in Thibet, and are about as picturesque little creatures as can possibly be seen.



The Bhootias have a very singular tradition, or rather

prophecy, concerning the lakes I have referred to, one of which is so large that no salt has hitherto been found in it. But, according to the prophecy, this lake will one day also dry up, and salt be obtained in it; and when this comes to pass, it will be conveyed, not as now by the natives of the country, but by a white people from the south, who will carry it themselves to the cities of the plains. It is said that this lake *is* already drying up, and the natives, expecting to find salt in it, are consequently dreading the fulfilment of the prophecy.

There is another singular and very ancient tradition, believed in by Mahomedans, Hindoos, and Rajputs alike, which, though not quite apposite to the one I have just related, is nevertheless interesting, as showing the general belief amongst them, that this land will one day be subjected, to a European Power. Towards the end of the world, it is said, a white man is to come riding on a white horse, bearing a white flag. All the nations of the world are to fall under his sway, and their names to be written on the flag, and there will then be a reign of universal peace and brotherhood,—a prophecy which, singularly enough, bears a very strong resemblance to that in the Book of the Revelation of St. John.

And now, having made a very steep ascent, we find ourselves in open moorland, and the frost begins to tighten over everything. Here and there a solitary rhododendron bush may be seen, whose hardy leaves, pinched with cold, shiver in the blast like living things. On our way

we saw several marmots, little animals very much like rats, only of a larger size. As we came along, we accidentally turned up two of their nests, which they make beneath the large stones. Like dormice, their habit is to sleep six months in the year, but they are now bustling to and fro, gathering in their winter store of rhododendron-buds, evidently expecting a long siege of cold weather.

All Nature wears a dreary aspect, and is wintry and *ariste*. Even in the shelter of the chinks and furrows, in the rock fragments, that lie along our pathway, the little black and white lichens tremble with the cold. Observing plenty of dead wood lying about, I request my people to drag it along, and a blazing fire is soon made, by the side of which Fanchyng and I sit and wait for the rest. In an hour's time they come creeping along, in twos and threes, followed by the gentlemen. As we ascend higher, the cold grows more intense, and the wind blows stronger. The ground is covered with long coarse grass, every blade of which is bearded with an icicle; and with the exception of this, and the aconite, which follows our footsteps everywhere, there is scarce a weed or tiny rock plant visible.

A short distance before us, we see a small cairn of stones, on the top of which is a cluster of bamboo canes, hung with streamers of coloured rag, all fluttering in the blast. Some blackened embers, the remains of a recent fire, induce us to believe that the wild-looking man leading the salt-laden goats, whom we met early in

the day, had raised it as a lowly tribute to his God ; and there was something very beautiful in this evidence of his faith in the Unseen, and in his having raised this 'little Bethel' on the summit of the lonely mountain, unobserved by human eye, in the presence alone of Him who dwelleth not in temples made with hands, and in whose sight those worthless many-coloured rags—the best he had to offer—may be as acceptable as the gorgeous banners one often sees in modern Christian churches. I wonder, will the angel who bears the golden censer deign to add his prayers to those of the 'faithful,' and, mingling them with incense, permit them to ascend to the one Great Spirit ? I trow yes.

Ah, me ! who amongst us Christians, with all our boasted superiority and greater privileges, would thus pause on his solitary journey, after the example of this poor 'benighted heathen,' or of One, who though He needed 'it not in His divine nature, yet 'rose up early, and sought a place to pray ?'



CHAPTER XXVIII.

WE FIND TENI-LIFE PARTICULARLY CHARMING IN WET
WEATHER !

WHAT a day it turned out to be ! The wind, increasing each moment, no longer blew, but cut one like knives, and gave one slaps in the face, and boxes in the ear, hitting out hard and straight, as though it meant it. It hissed savagely, and howled dismally, and whistled defiantly, and seemed to penetrate every thread of one's garments, and to blow one's very teeth down one's throat. It came knocking against the poor coolies with such force, that they staggered beneath their loads like drunken men, and then it scoured round them as if in glee, before rushing off to some other victim. Then the rain began pattering drop by drop upon the hard rhododendron leaves, and finished by coming down in sheets, and in a short time we were as wet as we could possibly be. Well, there was at least some comfort and consolation in that. We could be no wetter at any rate, and knew the worst ; but we were so blinded by it, not to say benumbed with the cold, that, observing a level piece of ground half a mile in front of us, which looked suitable for encampment, C— called a halt.

Our purpose had been to go on as far as Mount Singaleelah to-day, but I doubt whether we should have been able to reach it before an inconveniently late hour, even if the rain had not made our further progress altogether impracticable. Fortunately, all the baggage coolies



are pretty well up, so that there is no delay in getting tents pitched, &c.

Arriving first, I watch F—— and C—— breasting the storm, as they plod through the wind and rain. Although there are no impediments in the shape of trees on the spot which C—— has chosen, yet, having been slightly descending the last hour, we have again come

upon dense vegetation of the smaller kind, all of which must be cleared before anything can be done; and if in fine weather tent-pitching is attended with so much noise and excitement, it can readily be imagined how great it must be during rain, when the hubbub and confusion increase tenfold.

Amidst the general excitement, the only things that seem to take life as it comes, and make themselves perfectly at home, are the *moorghees*. No sooner are they released from their baskets, than, giving themselves a shake and a flutter, they strut about as if nothing had happened.

The first thing invariably thought of, on arrival at encampment, is to make a fire; but this time, as I stand dripping and watch the process, it seems as though it never would be accomplished, defying as it does the efforts of each man, who, despising everyone else, tries his hand in turn with equal failure. The moss and sticks have become so saturated with wet, that it is almost hopeless to expect them to ignite.

At length, shivering to my very heart's core, I see a little smoke issuing from the Prometheus-like hand of Catoo, who, holding the moss, is blowing it with the most coaxing and irresistible puffs, till it rewards him at last by bursting into a flame. Meanwhile Tendook has been hastily pitching his tent, which, being of a different kind, requires less 'fixing,' and now comes to beg I will avail myself of it; an offer I accept, although I have

my misgivings whether, wet as I am, I shall be very much the better for the shelter. I am already a walking cataract, a miniature Niagara,—a hundred tiny streamlets, formed by the dripping of my waterproof, eddying down the incline, and creating quite a respectable Maelstrom, as they meet together in a pool below.

Divesting myself of my soaking 'waterproof,' which is altogether a misnomer in these mountain regions, where the downpour is but feebly expressed by a pelting of the feline and canine species, and where it rains little short of dragons and megatheria. I enter, and seat myself upon an empty baggage basket in the middle of the tent, placed there for the purpose by the thoughtful Tendook, and soon discover that the difference between standing out in the rain and escaping from it is even less than I had imagined. The tent is square, and its canvas being single, the whole thing is evidently intended for fine weather only. The rain first saturates the highly ornamented canvas, and then comes through. I watch it trickle silently down the 'kernaughts,' sitting upon my basket, dripping as contentedly as I can, knowing that ere long a further douche awaits me.

In a few minutes down comes the anticipated drip, drip, drip, upon my head, gently and tenderly at first, in single drops, and then in streams. I now take refuge under an umbrella—a ponderous arrangement of the Gamp order, with brass handle, green of course, and 'like-wige' dripping,—also belonging to Tendook. Nothing

is farther from my intention, however, than taking cold, or allowing myself to be miserable ; but in those moist moments, whilst sitting like Patience on a monument, I think I *did* wonder what in the world made people travel.

Forth from the pelting pitiless rain, like a wet spectre, comes C——, carrying a glass with water in it, together



with a bottle of cognac, of which he insists upon my taking a little, to prevent 'cold and fever, and all that sort of thing, you know;' and I certainly never saw a man look so wet in my life—a fish was nothing to it. He was dripping from every thread and pore. From the sleeves of his coat, from the lobes of his ears, from his fingers' ends, it fell in infinitesimal waterfalls, whilst the brim of his helmet was

encircled by a row of bead-like drops. Looking up at him, I watched a little streamlet wind its way round the helmet in search of outlet, and, overflowing its borders, trickle down the bridge of his aristocratic nose, as though it had been a shoot ready-made for the occasion. He complimented me, also, on my moist appearance, and told me I looked like a bit of salvage from a wreck.

F—— had chosen a small piece of table-land below, about twenty feet long, by ten broad, on the extreme ridge of the mountain—a kind of natural shelf—and congratulated himself on having discovered a delightful little spot for our tent, requiring no ‘clearing,’ as no vegetation of any kind was growing upon it. But I shall always be under the impression to my dying day, that that charming spot, on which nothing manifestly *could* grow, was situated on the ‘watershed,’ or source of some river, such a thoroughly watery situation did it subsequently prove to be.

In a quarter of an hour, that seemed little short of a century, F——, who has been doing his best to speed on the pitching and arrangement of the tent for my reception, sends Tendook up to say that all is ready. As I went outside, the first object on which my eye rested was Fanchyng, coming through the driving rain, and may I never again behold such a poor, miserable, drowned wretch as she looked! whilst, *pour combler de misère*, she must needs plunge on her way into an unseen bog, from which she had to be extricated by the united efforts of two

baggage coolies, who were following close behind her, and then without her mocassins, which remained, beyond all hope of recovery, somewhere at the bottom.

Neither is the cup of *my* misfortunes yet full, for, descending to the tent by a slippery path, I formed a closer acquaintance with Mother Earth than I intended, not only covering myself with mud, but spoiling my hat, whose beauty was now gone for ever. So thoroughly shaken and overcome was I by my fall, at the moment of entering the tent, that I could have cried heartily had there been a clean, dry spot whereon to sit down and have it out comfortably, but as no such luxury existed, I tried to console myself instead, by listening to F— growling. And surely, if 'good men struggling with difficulties' are 'a spectacle for the gods,' he must have been a source of no ordinary entertainment and delight to those celestial magnates. During the process of tent-pitching he had worked himself up to a degree of mental irritation very unusual with him, but by no means to be wondered at under the circumstances, resulting, as he afterwards frankly confessed, in a very nebulous state of mind.

'My dear,' he exclaimed, as I presented myself—the 'my dear' uttered sententiously, and in the very reverse of a propitiatory tone—'this all comes of your travelling in a dandy: if you had done what I wished, it never would have happened.'

Now, it was quite true, he *had* wished me not to travel in a dandy, but in a dhoolie instead. Dhoolies are

of two kinds—the 'ferocious dhoolie' (a sort of bed), as we have seen ; and another of a totally different character, where the person carried sits sideways in a sort of sling, the pole passing just in front of the neck, producing a painful feeling of decapitation, the upper part of the body being on one side of the pole, and the lower on the other, so arranged as to balance the machine. This mode of conveyance is lighter, and consequently more easily carried ; but I objected to it, as being less comfortable than the Bareilly dandy. It was, consequently, dandy *versus* dhoolie for several weeks before starting ; for I am not one who so meekly bows her head to lordly rule as perhaps wife should—rule too of the mildest and most indulgent always. So I felt subdued, and filled with self-reproach ; yet I could not quite be brought to see how my obstinacy in travelling in a dandy could very materially alter the condition of the weather, and it was certainly puzzling to understand by what process he had arrived at this conclusion ; but having so arrived, he had a right to stick to his theory with the tenacity of a Briton.

'If you hadn't persisted in travelling in a dandy, my dear, it never could have happened.'

But what he meant by the statement I hadn't the ghost of an idea ; for he uttered it in the tone of one who had made up his mind to pursue a pet theory against all invasion, and with whom surrender was out of the question. So I did not attempt to argue the point, but left him master of the situation.

As our tent, unlike Tendook's, is fortunately impervious to external moisture, we have no need of an umbrella, being quite dry overhead, whilst a thick carpet of rhododendron leaves, which at this elevation are fully fifteen inches long and an eighth of an inch thick, had already been spread over the saturated ground. All, however, is unavailing; I sink ankle-deep in the 'dismal swamp' at each step I take. Wherever my foot rests but for an instant, it becomes an island surrounded by a pool of liquid mud, and I begin to feel in the condition of an amphibious animal, as defined by Charles Kingsley in his '*Water Babies*'—a something that 'can't live on the land, and dies in the water.'

I sit down upon a portmanteau, but it is only out of Scylla into Charybdis; it sinks so much even under my light weight, that I feel I must be descending into the very bowels of the earth. Whereupon I stand up again, and vainly try to change my soaking boots; but no sooner is one foot dry-shod than the other is wet, and this delightful state of things would no doubt have lasted till now, had not F——, in an agony of despair, shouted for Catoo, to see if he could suggest anything to mend matters. That ingenious functionary soon obeyed the summons, and I think I detected in his laughing eye a full appreciation of the absurdity of our position, which must have been quite irresistible to a Lepcha.

After a moment's reflection, he suggests that *branches* of rhododendron and large stones be substituted for the

carpet of leaves. Both are easily and quickly procured, and they answer the purpose of keeping our feet above the wet soil at any rate. By dint of balancing ourselves first on one foot and then on the other, we do at last contrive to make a tolerably satisfactory toilet, when, alas ! in an unlucky moment F — sits down on one of the little iron bedsteads, which first gives a loud snap, and then he and it subside on a level with the ground.

We had both ere this reached the climax of growling, and, as extremes meet, were just ready to turn the corner in the other direction, when the woe-begone bedstead, with its lame leg, and the 'come over-and-help-us' expression it wore, proved too much for our gravity, and ended in our indulging in a thoroughly hearty laugh.

Completely worn out by our exertions, but feeling conscious that we still owed a duty to society, we ascended the quagmire which led to the dining-tent, where we found ourselves, figuratively speaking, in smooth waters, everything wearing as snug and comfortable an appearance as possible, C — assuring us that, being high and dry, he had experienced none of those inconveniences to which we had been exposed down below.

The most that we expected for refection on such an inclement night was a 'cold swaree;' but the cloth had already been laid with all due propriety, and the preliminary solemnities, which usually accompany an Englishman's dinner, be he where he may, were being

undertaken by the usual staff of kitmutgars. Our host, conservative to a degree, was wont to regard irregular habits as demoralising, if not altogether sinful ; and he had evidently imbued the cook with a similar sentiment, for very soon a dinner was served which quite amazed us all. It must have been a supreme effort on his part, under such difficulties, and I know it was a supreme moment to us, hungry as we were ; and no one could have appreciated C——'s conservatism more than we did then, or have done more ample justice to its results.

Before leaving the dining-tent, F—— collected the whole camp together, and gave a portion of rum to each. On returning to our 'watershed,' or whatever it might be, on which our tent was situated, we found the rain had quite ceased, and a solitary tearful little star was doing its best to shine above a long line of black cloud. Away in the western horizon the sky was comparatively clear, giving some hope of a better state of things on the morrow ; and on entering our little ark, we also found that the waters there had abated considerably. The rain having ceased during our absence, the dhurrie had been laid down over the floor, and there was a manifest improvement in affairs generally. The kettle too—which always seems to be in good spirits—was singing its very heart out on the bright little stove, as if to say there was plenty of comfort yet in life, and we might as well cheer up and make the best of everything as *it* did.

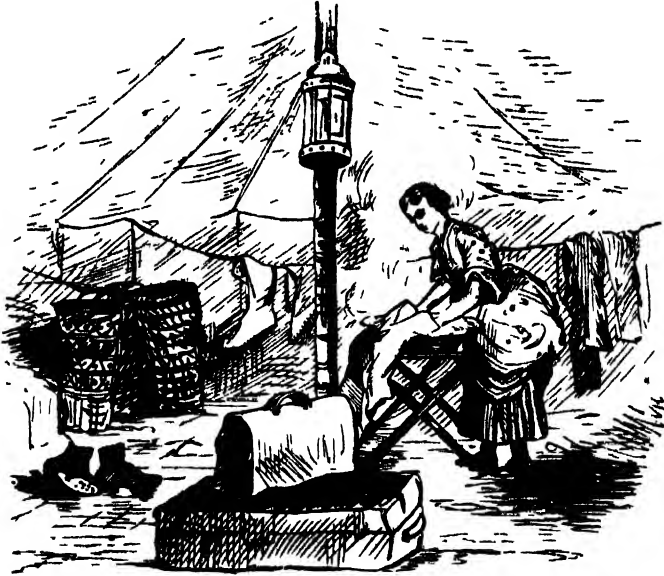
The first thing I determined on doing was to wash

those portions of my travelling dress which had become soiled by my fall. I had insisted on Fanchyng's changing her clothes and going straight to her lair on arrival, telling her I would dispense with her services for the night; so tucking up my sleeves, I buckled to valiantly, as if to the manner born; and we should no doubt have made an interesting picture, had an artist been here to paint us.—*Materia*—picturesque contents of the tent itself. stove at other end, vulgar kettle sending forth its steam, F—— just composing himself in the arms of Morpheus, my scarlet dress and mocassins hanging on a line to dry, various baggage baskets of all sorts and sizes in the corner; lantern suspended from tent-pole, and—yes! why not?—myself also, by this time surrounded by a cloud of steam, scrubbing away vigorously in a large brass 'chilumchce,' or basin. Subject—'An Interior.'

My hat was spoiled beyond all remedy; my dress too, I soon found, had sustained great damage, my feeble scrubbing making very little impression upon it; but my mocassins, save that they presented what is termed a 'cockled' appearance from the rain, were a 'thing of beauty still, and a joy for ever.'

Congratulating me on my picturesque appearance, F—— soon fell asleep, remarking that, after all, it was 'clean dirt,' and if I failed in my praiseworthy endeavours, he supposed it would 'wear off;' evidently glad to dismiss the subject on such easy terms, and be left in peace

instead of being called upon to assist in the process. He was soon snoring sweetly, keeping up a trombone accompaniment to the musical laving of the water in C major against the sides of the 'chilumchee.'



(From F — 's memorandum book. Sketch from memory.)

CHAPTER XXIX.

FACES IN THE ROCKS.

THE next morning at the first peep of dawn, creeping softly out to ascertain what sort of day it was likely to be, I am not a little surprised to find F——, who has preceded me, standing in a very matutinal costume looking also at the indications of the weather.

The sky is ominously red, and miles of leaden vapour lying in the valley, are heaving wildly like an angry sea, which, to look down upon and into, makes one positively giddy. While we stand here, we are greeted by the muffled tones of our host, proceeding from beneath his rugs, likewise making anxious inquiries concerning the weather. At the same moment Catoo appears, the bearer of the very alarming information that the cook has fever, and *bahut bīmār hai* (is very ill); and that two of the ponies are disabled, one from a sore back, the other lame from an injury sustained on the march hither. This latter intelligence, however, affects us but little, as they are never ridden now; but as misfortunes seldom come alone, he adds with a rueful countenance, that our 'Sappers' have bolted.

This is indeed a serious matter, and we are at a loss to know how we can go on without them; but Tendook, joining us at this moment, says he thinks it more than likely, that they have simply fled to a small village twelve miles distant down the gorge, to find shelter from the rain, where they will probably remain till the sky clears, and then join us again.

Exposure to the damp, no less than sudden changes in the temperature, invariably brings on an attack of fever and ague with these people, whose *physique*, I fancy, is greatly impaired by eating so little animal food. They consequently lose all pluck in bad weather, although at other times they will bear cold, fatigue, and even hunger uncomplainingly. Rain they cannot endure, and I doubt whether any of them would have accompanied us had they foreseen this unprecedented state of things. There surely must be some great atmospheric mismanagement somewhere. One would be inclined to imagine that Oberon and Titania had had another falling out; for, as I have said before, after the breaking up of the rainy season, which we thought *had* taken place, with its accustomed punctuality, six weeks ago no rain is expected till the monsoon comes round again.

This is a chapter of accidents. No sooner are we seated at breakfast, than one of our kitmutgars informs us that the calf is ill, in consequence of which the cow refuses to yield her milk. *We* are none of us the worse, however, at present, for the wetting we had yesterday, so

that we must not complain, but cheerfully put up with such small vexations as the foregoing.

We had struck tents, and were under weigh, when C—— was overtaken by another messenger, but this time, happily, of no evil tidings. He came to say that a Soubah—the diplomatic agent of the Rajah of Sikkim—



was on his way to meet him, and that we should find him *sitting on the top of Mount Singaleelah*, for thus the message was quaintly worded in the vernacular. So singular an announcement naturally amused us not a little, and, picturing him to our imagination as a sort of sphinx or presiding genius of the peak, the above was of course the kind of thing we expected to see; but I beg to say that the pipe is an addition and after-thought of F——.

We now pass through scenery extravagantly wild

and barren in the extreme, for Nature is here destitute of vegetation of every kind, except that of small herbaceous plants and a coarse shaggy grass, brown at this season, which hangs over the stern and ancient rocks, whose tints, from the combined influence of time and weather, have become so subdued and saddened, that the hardy lichens and bright little rock-plants seem to have crept into their cracks and crannies to hide themselves, as if afraid of 'looking out of keeping' with everything that is so very old and sad.

All is rendered more weird and savage still by the heavy masses of cloud which, like boiling vapour, continually roll over us; whilst the jagged portions of the enormous blocks of gneiss which lie along our pathway, occasionally wrenching fragments of it from the general mass hold it clinging to themselves, like spirits caught in the arms of giants. Everywhere rocks, heaped one upon another, are hewn and sculptured into such fantastic shapes and forms, that one cannot help fancying that giants in primæval time must have rudely fashioned their Ideal, and then left it for successive generations to marvel at. What castles in the air! What grim fortresses!

What colossal faces look down upon us! the long grass which hangs over their foreheads like tangled hair only adding to the resemblance.



At six o'clock, but still broad daylight, even in this wintry season and misty weather—for the sun sets tardily in this northern land—the mountains far and near resound with the hammering of tent-pegs, and we catch



sight of our encampment in a sheltered hollow enclosed to the right by a mural precipice. On one side rise sterile mountains, on the other stretches a verdant valley, and deeps wildly beautiful. All the men are well up, and pitching tents. Many of the tired baggage coolies may be seen already fast asleep, whilst others, squatting before their fires, are cooking their evening meal. Waiting the completion of my tent, I climb a little knoll, whence I can see, without being seen, the food of these simple folk not only cooked but eaten; and one instance is, I fancy, an example of that of all the rest, as far as custom is concerned, be they Lepchas, Bhootias, or Nepaulese.

Rice is first boiled in a 'deckshee,' and when sufficiently tender is taken out and strained back again through a cloth—usually part of their clothing!—till the water attains the consistency of arrowroot. This, which is called 'cungi,' they drink, leaving the residue of the rice to be eaten separately. This rice, with an ear or two of parched Indian corn, formed the only nourishment of these hardy mountaineers after their long day's toil.

I am now summoned to my own repast by the

squeaky and intermittent tones of our kitmutgar, who has lost his fever, but, in common with many others, is suffering from severe cold, his voice coming and going in fitful gusts and bursts of sound. In fact, by this time we are all experiencing the disagreeable consequences of yesterday's campaign, in the shape of colds of one kind or another, more or less highly developed; C —, on whom the greater elevation is evidently beginning to result in slight mental obliquity, gravely announcing at dinner the startling fact, that we are all suffering from the effects of *to-morrow!*

We were still seated at table, and everything was proceeding with the usual amount of ceremony and decorum, when all at once we heard a great uproar in camp. Everyone would seem to have congregated in one common centre, and to be engaged in very noisy and angry discussion. Suspending operations for an instant, we go out to ascertain the cause, and behold our tall Bhootia Syce, the central figure of the crowd, holding by the neck an unhappy and very ill-clad native, whom he was dragging along in the direction of our tent, amidst the shrieks and howls of the rest, all of whom follow in the wake.

This unusual excitement arises from the poor wretch having appropriated to himself the Syce's 'camul or blanket. He is a stranger, who joined camp this morning, ostensibly to earn an honest pice or two; but it appears now to be the general opinion that he did so for the sole purpose of seeing what he could 'annex,' and I scarcely

know what fate would have awaited him, had not C—— and F—— interfered, insisting that the Syce, who seemed much inclined to take the law into his own hands, should relinquish his hold.

The verdict having been given, and justice administered by C——, peace and tranquillity followed, on the restitution of the blanket; and the culprit, being permitted to leave camp without further punishment, took to his heels, fled down the mountain with the swiftness of an arrow, and was out of sight in an instant.

This is the place where we hoped to have found the Soubah awaiting our arrival; but, contrary to our expectations, he is not here. I fancy the recent heavy rains may have made prolonged 'sitting on the mountain' rather a damp and uncomfortable proceeding, and that he probably returned with precipitation for warmth and shelter to his own quarters, wherever they may happen to be. But there are manifold evidences of some recent 'presence,' for in places where the ground is smoothest, curious bamboo tables, with high benches alongside them, have been made—a delicate attention, Tendook assures us, on the part of the Soubah, who has caused them to be prepared for us. These hill people, like all Orientals, take their food squatted on the ground, so that even in this remote part of the world, some dim tradition of the manners and customs of Europeans must have reached them. They could, however, have expected nothing short of giants, for the benches were so enormously high that C——

himself, although measuring more than six feet, could not, when seated on them, reach the ground even with his toes, whilst the tables were equally high in proportion.

By such *small* tokens did this mysterious individual bid us welcome; but, besides all these, here and there, little stacks of newly cut wood were piled, in readiness for our bivouac—an attention our poor men were duly grateful for, saving them, as it did, the fatigue and trouble of cutting it themselves, after their long day's march. To our great relief, Cato here meets us with the gratifying intelligence that the little corps of 'Sappers' have returned to camp.

After dinner, we have a long discussion over the fire as to our future route; our attendants having urged us to alter it, and by leaving the Singaleelah Range, which would take us in a north-westerly direction over the Dumgongla and Kanglanamo Passes—the only approach to the glaciers in this route—to strike off hence to Pemionchi, and thence to travel due east to Jongli.

The reason they give for wishing us to change our original intention is, that whilst it was raining heavily with us, it was, in all probability, snowing in the greater elevations, and that, should such be the case, the passes would be choked with snow, and also that henceforward there will be no tracks to guide us along the way. We do not mean to abandon our first plans, however, unless obliged, believing their advice is not wholly disinterested, and that they are only trying to frighten us, hoping thereby

to succeed in inducing us to go to Pemionchi, where many of them—Tendook amongst the number—have friends. Besides which, a pilgrimage to the Buddhist temple and monastery at that place is a soul-saving exercise, a benefit we are not yet disposed to confer upon them ; for, should we consent to their proposal, not only should we have to traverse the same road twice—as we propose *returning* by way of Pemionchi—but, after having made so considerable an ascent, should have to descend at once seven thousand feet, and travel up an almost perpendicular path to Jongli, which stands at an elevation of fourteen thousand feet, and thence again have to come down to the valley of the Ratong, before we could reach even the base of the Snowy Range. We therefore await with great anxiety the arrival of the Soubah, who will, we hope, be able to give us some trustworthy information, and help us to a decision.

It begins to be a marvel to us all in these days, that we do not actually go mad from want of sleep, for the people of our camp—the greater number of whom, worn out by the day's fatigue, are asleep within two hours of arrival—are as lively as crickets at midnight, about which time they all begin talking and gambling, the latter being a perfect passion with these mountaineers. It is quite impossible to keep them quiet, and if they are not gambling, they either drawl out Thibetan songs, in a melancholy strain that makes one's sleep sepulchral, or set up an extemporaneous howl, in which all join in dismal discord.

Then from afar, during brief intervals of silence, come the Arcadian notes of a shepherd's pipe, played by little Rags, one of my dandy-bearers, which break the stillness not unmusically with strains plaintive and soothing to the ear.

These dissipated people keep their fires burning all night, replenishing them from time to time with the canes of the small bamboo, which, bursting in the flames, make loud explosions like that of musketry, all wildly echoed from rock to rock, and everything is bitterly antagonistic to sleep.



CHAPTER XXX.

MOUNT SINGALEELAH, 12,330 FEET.

THE cold now being very great at night at these elevations, I suggested to F — that some better arrangement should be made for Fanchyng's shelter, proposing that a little blanket tent be rigged up at the back of our own, just large enough to contain her when lying at full length. This was easily accomplished by means of two sticks stuck into the ground at head and foot, and tied together at the top, after the manner of gipsies' tents, one long one being placed horizontally between them. This, with a blanket thrown over it, and a large piece of waterproof sheeting covering all, with which we supplied her, made exceedingly snug quarters.

During the small hours I fancied I heard myself called twice, 'Mem sahib! Mem sahib!' the sound apparently proceeding from Fanchyng's tent. Presently there was a piercing shriek, beginning in a high key, and descending the gamut like a groan.

F — was on his feet in an instant, and making the most rapid toilet he could assume, more asleep than awake, poor fellow, shouldered an umbrella, which I

could see by the dim light afforded by the lantern he had mistaken for his rifle, and thus equipped went forth manfully to the rescue, with obscure notions of burglars, fire, and wild beasts blended together.

Walking in the direction of Fanchyng's tent, he found that young person standing erect, and apparently much frightened, declaring she had seen a snake rear its head at the foot of her tent. From her description, it could have been little short of a python or the sea-serpent himself. She



had doubtless eaten fungus, or lichen, or some other indigestible compound, before retiring for the night; or her change of quarters had affected her slumbers, and it was all the result of a dream, as F—, fully awake by this time, tried to assure her, when, on making a minute search, he found nothing.

At length dawn arriving, I got up to see the sun rise above the noble Singaleelah range.

As I have stated, three sides of our encampment are bounded by sterile mountains, which frown down upon us with a menacing aspect; but below, stretches a wondrous expanse of valley, and the eye wanders on this side over mountain steeps, from their barren summits clothed with

arctic lichen, and here and there a rugged pine, down to the region of tropical vegetation, where the outlines of the stately palm and feathery bamboo may frequently be recognised, even from this altitude, and the whole forms a combination of gentle beauty and savage grandeur rarely to be met with.

As we ascend and descend, it is exceedingly interesting to note the changes which take place in the vegetation, not only in the trees themselves and their parasites, but in the small plants which clothe the ground. We enter the region of a particular tree, and as we leave that behind, another takes its place ; and so on with the smaller flora. We pass, for instance, through a zone or belt of pines, rhododendrons, and hill-bamboo ; then descending further, we come upon chestnut, oak, maple, birch, acacia, cherry, pandanus-palm, sol, plantain, and others *ad infinitum*, till we reach a variety of tropical palms and bamboo in the warmer climate of the valleys. Even at this elevation there are far fewer deciduous trees than one sees in the winter in England, where it always strikes me as cruel and unlike nature to rob them of their clothing, just when they seem to need it most.

We are to halt here a day or two, not only to give ourselves, but our poor attendants rest, and looking in the direction of the camp, I see men in strange attire. They are the retinue of our Soubah, whose advent we hope is now not far distant. One of them coming up to me, and 'kowtowing' his very best (making a salaam), tells

me he will be here to-morrow, and we look forward to his arrival, as to some perfectly new sensation.

F—— and C—— now join me, and we very soon observe these men—our own assisting—hauling along three heavy slabs of 'gneiss,' like elongated mile-stones, which puzzle us not a little; but this Soubah is altogether such a mysterious personage, that conjecture is useless. After breakfast, C—— goes with his rifle in search of moonals into the forest, whence a report reaches us at frequent intervals, echoed from one mountain to another, till the air seems vibrating with muffled guns.

We are here joined by a nephew of Tendoock, named Goboon, an interesting lad with a soft girlish face, and features of a very refined type. Over his shoulders his hair hangs in long flowing curls; but, in spite of this, he possesses a noble and manly bearing, and carries his head magnificently. He wears a turban of Lepcha cloth, striped with blue and buff, a short full tunic of scarlet cloth, so made as to leave the neck and chest bare, and a kirtle confined at the waist by a belt, from which hangs the usual Lepcha 'ban,' encased in a handsome silver scabbard. Every movement of his frame is full of natural grace and dignity, and he reminds me forcibly of the striplings one reads of in the Bible. I observe that, although he mingles with the rest, and addresses them quite familiarly, they one and all show him every token of respect; and it is easy, even among these semi-barbarians, to see who are of gentle birth.

Catoo, who has been thus far before, now comes to inform me that a lovely view of Mount Everest is to be obtained some two hundred feet above, with—as far as I can understand him—a lake, or tarn, in the foreground. Accordingly, collecting my sketching materials together, I make ready for the climb.

All my dandy-bearers were in attendance; but as F—— and Tendook offered to accompany me, I decided, with their help and that of my alpenstock, to walk.

‘You may all return to your camp,’ I said, addressing them, thinking they would be only too glad to have their services dispensed with.

‘Very good, Mem sahib,’ broke in Hatti, patronisingly, evidently regarding himself as an exception—he always seemed to take a sort of proprietary interest in me—‘you can walk with me, and the sahib, and Tendook. We don’t want *these*,’ looking round contemptuously on about a dozen others. ‘We don’t want you,’ he added, waving his hand majestically; ‘*you may go.*’

‘What!’ exclaimed Nautch-wallah, in a peevish and deeply injured tone, separating himself from the group. ‘Who are you to say *I* am not to go with the Mem sahib? You are all very well to *carry* her; but who’s to run down the ‘khud’ after her easel, I should like to know, if the wind blows it away, as it did the other day?’ casting a glance first at Hatti’s massive unwieldy figure, and then at the crowd for approbation. ‘You can’t run, *you!* ha! ha!’

'Well then,' I said, to end the matter, for I thought they were coming to blows, 'you can both come with me if you like.'

'And if I don't go too, Mem sahib,' said the little Lepcha named Joogoo, 'who is there to tell you the names of the mountains and the plants?'

'I shall carry her *taswir ke chiz* (sketching things),' exclaimed another, in a dogged determined tone.

'And *chota* Rags, Mem sahib, *chota* Rags,' I heard a small plaintive voice saying behind me.

Turning round I saw such a disappointed, forsaken look in the little man, that I replied, 'Of course, *chota* (little) Rags,' as they all call him now, 'of course you must come; how could I do without you? run and get your flute, and you can play whilst I paint;' and seeing the eager faces of the others, all anxious to be thought worthy to be of help, I said, 'There, you may *all* come if you wish it.'

In an instant the whole rabble were off, with expressions of glee, laughing, shouting, and scrambling up before me, hand linked in hand, like so many children.

Catoo's *taswir*, however, turned out to be rather a failure; Mount Everest obstinately refused to show himself. But extending our ramble we reached the verge of a precipice, below which yawned a frightful gulf. It would have been quite impossible to stand and look down into it; but, throwing ourselves on the ground, we crawled along to its edge, and gazed into the almost fathomless

abyss beneath ; after which Cato, walking by my side, related a sad story connected with this spot. Some years ago a Nepaulese lad fell over, but was caught by a ledge of projecting rock. His cries reached a shepherd who was tending his flocks some little distance off. Trying to descend to his rescue, the brave fellow was dashed to pieces, whilst the lad managed to scramble up alone, and was saved.

This is one of those problems that puzzle us sorely in this world of ours : how He, who is said to number the very hairs of our head, and without whose ken not a sparrow falls to the ground, should yet permit such a fate to overtake one, whose true heroism seems the rather to merit great reward. Yet instances of the kind are met with each day we live—how one, ministering to the sick in a contagious disease, falls a victim to it himself, although the patient lives ; whilst another, plunging into the cold wave to rescue a drowning man, is frequently lost, although he for whose succour he risked his life will probably reach shore in safety.

But our understanding is finite, and 'our thoughts not as His thoughts.' It is one of those mysteries that death alone can solve ; yet it may be that such noble deeds have their immediate reward, in a very glorious awakening in another state of being. For although we, in our ignorance of the future, look upon the continuance of our lives here, with all their toils and sorrows, as a thing so greatly to be desired, we know not, except in

he mere abstract, how infinitely better that other life will be that awaits us, or how, if we *did* know, we might regard the swift arrow of death, that ushers us within its portals, as a thing to be coveted and yearned for, with an impatience and ardent longing beyond all else. The All-good and kind may, in taking them at once from this world, where so much is evil, reward such Hectors by introducing them into instant and amazing happiness. It is thus alone, believing firmly as I do in an overruling Providence ever about our path, that I can in my own poor mind reconcile that which otherwise would seem so strange and irreconcilable.

An hour or two later in the day, F—— and I were fortunate enough to see one of those phenomena which are not unfrequently observed in these Alpine heights, and which went far to explain the colossal apparition which concluded my midnight adventure. Standing on the verge of the mountain, and looking down into the valley I have before spoken of, I found myself suddenly enveloped in a soft mist, in the centre of which my own figure, greatly exaggerated, was darkly shadowed. The whole thing appeared so suddenly, that I was at first quite startled: a giant phantom seemed again to have arisen before me. As I moved, it moved; I walked along a few paces, and saw it following me; I raised my hand, and the spectre raised its hand also; and then it flashed across my mind that I was in a sunbow. F—— was not far off, and, summoning him, he made another

giant spectre beside me. Around our shadows were zones of rainbow light; but even as we watched it, it all gradually faded away with the mist, and the valley at our feet became as radiant as before.

After this, sitting at my tent door, I sketched the natives as they passed to and fro. Having observed my occupation, Tendook at length presented himself in the most alarming and overpowering 'get up' it is



possible to imagine—amber satin, covered with a pattern of green dragons, and lined with crimson silk brocade, his portly frame adorned with as much jewellery as he could conveniently carry—and asked me to take his likeness. He of course looks infinitely better in his every-day garb; but not liking to wound his mind by telling him so, for the effect

ust have been produced by no ordinary pains, I accede to his request.

We must all have felt how strongly the power of association acts occasionally in recalling memories of the past : it may be of things forgotten long ago, but still lying hidden within the secret chambers of the brain. We all know how simple a thing will do it—the scent of a flower, the ripple of the sea, the murmur of the wind, a single note of music, a look even—and what a magic spell such association often weaves, in not only recalling events, but thoughts, feelings, and even momentary sensations. It has been related by one who well knew the marvellous power of this association, that once upon a time a poor Scotch artist, having left his native hills, came to the busy metropolis to seek for employment. He had doubtless fancied, like Dick Whittington, that its streets were paved with gold, or had probably heard that England was called by the Phœnicians “ *Tin* Island.” However that may be, he found but small encouragement in his art, and wandering, disappointed and sad, from street to street with almost empty pockets, he came suddenly upon a Highlander playing the familiar bagpipes. Those wild and discordant strains called up visions of his native mountains ; and as he listened, the tears chasing each other down his cheeks, he thrust his hand into his pocket, and, as he himself declared afterwards, ‘ I could na help it, I just gi’ed him my last halfcrown.’

So, whilst taking Tendook’s portrait, I keep think-

ing of a sweet summer day, just before leaving England for India, and the scent of the honeysuckle and meadow-sweet in the hedgerows comes wafted towards me across the time waves of four long years.

I was sitting under a row of elms, sketching a broken-down and superannuated waggon, which for lack of room elsewhere had been cast aside on a road-side bank. Full of poetry was this time-worn waggon, its rickety wheels covered with marl, telling of years of rumblings to and



fro, in shady lanes, and goings with the team to water in green pools, and of lingerings outside the 'Wheatsheaf,' whilst Hodge went in to have his mid-day 'glass.' As I thus sketched, a farmer came up on his homeward way, and after standing and looking at me with much amazement over a stile, exclaimed :

'You beant niver goin' to put that there old ran-shaklin in yer pictur, ma'am. Law!' added he, apologetically, 'if I'd know'd that, I'd 'a had 'en painted and tackled up a bit; or if you wanted a waggon, or cart, or the likes o' that to draft, why, bless'ee, I got a *bran new 'un* in that shed yander.' The farmer comprehended as little as old Tendook, who arrayed himself thus in gorgeous apparel, that the poetry and pictorial beauty of things lie chiefly in their being time-worn and dilapidated.

The sketch being finished to his entire satisfaction—he is in ecstasies over the bright gold ornaments round his neck—Cattoo stands before me with a low salaam, and begs that I will 'write' his *taswir* also. Natives are all wonderfully fond of having their likenesses taken, and he forms a much more pleasing subject certainly—a good-looking Lepcha, about five-and-twenty, in his ordinary costume, his hair plaited in one long tail, which is the distinguishing mark between the sexes amongst this tribe, the men plaiting it in one tail, the women in two.

After this little Rags presents himself, a meek petitioner for the same favour; but tired by this time, I examine his flute instead, promising to gratify him at some future period. It is merely a small piece of bamboo cane, an inch in diameter, in which five or six holes have been burnt—a slight instrument, truly, to emit sounds so sweet and Arcadian.

Then all go their way, and how pleasant it is to sit alone, under a sky of cloudless azure, whilst vision after

vision comes floating through the brain, not obtrusively, but, like slow-paced shadows, vague and strange and only half real, or as belonging to some previous existence. Have we not all felt something like this also when reclining in the sunshine on a summer day, too indolent to think in earnest, or concern ourselves with life's complications, and when even the billows on its ocean seem breaking calmly on quiet sunlit shores? At such moments—oases in the desert of our lives—a tranquil feeling steals over us, and we hardly seem to be living in a real world of work and action, but floating somewhere beyond it. Then are our very sorrows forgotten, those spectres which follow our footsteps, and cast dark spots upon our sunshine; forgotten, that is, as far as the incidents themselves are concerned, but not so, surely, in their influence on our lives. For it is sorrow that often awakens the very divinest part of our being, which otherwise might never have started into life, nor would Nature, which with many is but a dead language, appeal to us so eloquently as she does. I cannot believe in one who has known nought but happiness—one who has never struggled in those unseen crises of the heart, as at one period or other of their lives all must who have truly *lived*—holding fellowship with either storm or sunshine.

While I thus idly linger, as in a pleasant trance, the peaceful day passes into evening. Slanting shadows lengthen athwart the mountain, till the valley is wrapped in shade. I watch the blue line creep slowly along it, until,

extending upwards, it gathers everything far and near in one sombre tint of grey. Mists rise and shut out distant objects one by one, and the air grows chill. The firing of C——'s gun ceases, the echoes are hushed; he must be returning with his spoils. F——, too, appears, a little black speck in the distance, as he comes scrambling down the mountain, whither he had gone on an exploring expedition. The coolies light their fires, and smoke ascends from a dozen nooks and corners. Wood crackles, lights gleam, shadowy figures flit here and there, whilst the subdued hum of voices—for they are seldom boisterous at this hour—and a plaintive, wailing air, played by 'Little Rags,' who, as usual, is telling out his love, as he sits apart on a moss and lichen-covered rock, sound wondrously peaceful and dreamy.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SOUBAH OF MONGMOO.

WE had pictured to our imagination something so sphinx-like and out of the ordinary way in the Soubah, that great was our surprise when, early this morning, on hearing of his arrival, and leaving our tents to receive him, we found one of the *prettiest* and most benevolent old men possible, but so very old and patriarchal-looking that he might have been Noah, or one of those who flourished about the time of the Flood, if, indeed, he were not altogether pre-Adamite. I should say, speaking advisedly, as one who would not libel him, that he had not washed for centuries at least. This fact alone, however, adds greatly to his pictorial appearance, for the rich and mellow colouring of his skin, by nature intended to be fair, is perfectly charming, artistically considered, and he is the exact personification of one of Rembrandt's glorious pictures, mellowed by time; and were one told that he had been sitting and smoking himself over the fire for a thousand years, one would scarcely feel surprised.

The expression of his face is extremely pleasing. He

has to an unusual extent the laughing Lepcha eye, which makes him look as though he were always mentally enjoying a bit of sportive raillery, to which he never gives vent in words, or as if, having discovered the vanity of all things mundane, he regards us with pitying curiosity, wondering what we had come thus far to see, and revelling in the idea that we, too, should one day waken up to the fact that all things living are vanity.

His hair, which is perfectly white, hangs in long, loose masses over his shoulders, whilst his costume—a robe of garnet-coloured cloth—extends to his feet, which are encased in mocassins of divers colours. He also wears a large broad-brimmed hat of finely plaited grass, bound round the edge with the fur of the ‘cat-bear’—a small animal inhabiting the higher elevations, the fur of which resembles the finest sable—and from the capacious pouch, formed by the loose folds of his robe above the girdle, he produces eggs and a bottle of wild honey, and places them at C——’s feet. But even then he appeared to have any amount of small personal luggage concealed within ; and I may as well say here, that, before leaving, I saw him at different times, when necessity called for them, produce from his bosom a tinder-box, a brick of Thibet tea, a brass pipe, his chop-sticks, and tweezers.

He is a man of no mean stature, and with his arms folded over his breast, or lying calmly by his side—for he is sparing of both words and gesture, as one who has grown too wise for speech—he is a very wooden-

figured man, and carries me back to the shadowy days of childhood, when on Sunday afternoons, all other toys, puzzles, and such-like wicked week-day amusements having been put beyond my reach, Noah's Ark was brought forth as a religious Sunday treat, together with a Scripture picture-book, wherein Daniel in a den of lions rampant seemed always the most prominent. I can remember now, as if it were but yesterday, how that, by a perversion of facts which clings to me still—showing the omnipotence of early teaching, pictorial or otherwise—Daniel was represented as an old bald-headed man, in a blue dressing-gown, while a very young king indeed, surmounted by a coronet of yellow and red, was looking through a grating to see how he was getting on. This, together with a picture representing a group of open-mouthed alligators on the banks of the Nile, generally sent me to my little bed with a whole Tattersall's of incipient nightmares.

Noah's Ark in those days was the very load-star of my existence, and Sunday, I am obliged truthfully to confess, has never been quite the same happy day, since—those golden gates past—it was put away with other childish things. As I look at this gentle old man it is like a dream revived, for my Ark family were clad in garnet-colour too, and also wore broad-brimmed, low-crowned hats, the only difference seeming to me to exist in the fact, that the Soubah was endowed with feet and legs, whereas *they* rested upon the basis of their habiliments

only. I can remember, too, at that time when thought began to dawn out of the chaos of mere sensation, that I regarded the former appendages as post-diluvian, adopted by reason of the general sloppiness of nature, after the subsiding of the waters, which rendered a kind of stilts necessary to get about the world in, when they left the ark. Favourite of all the family was Shem, on account of a pleasing docility of expression, of which the Soubah forcibly reminds me.

It is not easy to realise that this delightful old Philistine, the Soubah, is a great personage amongst his own people, having Sepoys at his command, and a numerous retinue; but so it is, and as he loiters silently about the camp, the only interest and curiosity of which he seems capable, are evidently vested in me. He had never, as he subsequently informed F——, seen an Englishwoman before in Sikkim.

After having communicated our difficulties to him, C—— takes out Major Sherwill's map, and consults him about the route we are to follow; and I am glad to say he has not only set our fears at rest with regard to our projected journey along the crest of the Singaleelah Range, but has sketched a programme for us, which



sounds very encouraging. He also promises one of his own men as Guide.

According to an arrangement made between C—— and the Kajee of Yangting, we were to have found men awaiting us here with supplies of rice; but as they have not come, C—— sent a messenger to him this morning, his dwelling being two days' march down the valley, to remind him of his promise, for the people of our camp are complaining sorely of the shortness of provisions, and we do not well see how we can pursue our journey unless food reach us. Should it not do so speedily, it will be more than provoking.

We spend the morning in drying and pressing the specimens of moss and lichen which we gathered on each day's march in coming hither, and are all busily occupied in various ways, when our attention is directed to a green knoll above our encampment, where a crowd of persons seems to have collected. Curiosity prompting us to join it, we find the Soubah and a number of his followers in the process of erecting the three slabs I have before mentioned, on the margin of a tarn, situated in a basin or hollow of the mountain. This tarn, which is hidden until approached quite closely, we had not even imagined to exist.

We soon learn that these slabs are intended to represent C——, F——, and myself, and are to commemorate the interesting fact of our having encamped on this mountain. The Lepchas regard these tarns as sacred,

and there may be a deeper significance than we ourselves were aware of, in these simple people erecting memorials of our advent, by its still waters, where they look like Druidical remains. When night at last wore on, it made me feel quite miserable to think they were so lonely.

The large one in the centre represents C——, as becomes the greater dignity of his social position, that to the right F——, and the little fat stumpy one looking like an excrescence, myself, which I feel slightly inclined to



resent, being, I beg to say, neither fat nor stumpy; but then in this country a woman is nothing socially, a '*koosh nae*,' which being interpreted means *nothing*.¹

I once knew a lady in the plains who, having called at the house of a friend to enquire after the health of a mother and her new-born babe, and on prolonging her

¹ Spelt *kuchh na*, but pronounced as above

enquiries, begged to be informed of the sex of the little stranger, was gravely answered by the native servant, '*koosh nae, mem sahib*,' it happening to be a girl. Should you unfortunately be one of the weaker sex, and ask permission to see the interior of one of their temples or mosques, you will be told, with more candour than politeness, that 'neither dogs nor women are allowed to enter!'

I am by no means one of those strong-minded females who advocate what is mis-called 'woman's rights;' on the contrary, I believe women have tenderer, sweeter, purer, if not nobler, rights than such advocates wot of—rights best suited to the gentler nature of her sex, and hidden deep in the sweet and gentle life of home; but there are limits to the depreciation of womankind in the social scale, and in behalf of my Oriental sisters I object to the above order of ideas.

There is, however, a little Eden even in this hemisphere, all amongst the Kasia Hills in Eastern Bengal—a happy land where women command the men and 'rule over them;' where the men are domestic drudges and 'keepers at home,' looking after the children;—where property legally and by custom descends through women;—where the boys are '*koosh naes*' and the girls, for once, are everything, and have it all their own way!

CHAPTER XXXII.

CONJUGAL DIFFERENCES.

• HAVING determined upon adhering to our original intention of travelling over the Singaleelah Range, we have been occupied all the morning in taking out the warm clothing we have hitherto kept in reserve for the greater heights, mine being either thickly wadded or lined with fur, thus obviating the necessity of cumbering myself with a number of wraps. We have also packed up all the heavy baggage, such as camp bedsteads, and tent furniture of every kind that we can absolutely dispense with, as it is impossible for the coolies to carry any but light loads over the steep and rugged mountain passes which we shall henceforth have to traverse. We therefore purpose sending fourteen men, heavily laden, together with our worse than useless ponies, to Pemionchi, to await our arrival there. As they will be descending the whole way, each man is to carry a double load, and we are not sorry to feel that we shall have fewer in camp to feed, in these barren and inhospitable regions, in case of continued scarcity. We also instituted a grand search for an aneroid ther-

mometer, and two pairs of dark blue spectacles which were packed together in a case by themselves, F——, as an old Alpine traveller, knowing the great importance of the latter in avoiding snow-blindness; but our search being fruitless, we are forced to the unwilling conclusion that they must all have been left behind.

On opening one of my portmanteaus, however, which I had had no occasion to do until now, I found concealed amongst the folds of a dress the little silver amulet, containing charms, which Lattoo was so desirous I should bring with me the evening I last saw her. The poor girl, strong in her belief in its efficacy, and evidently determining I should not go without it, must have placed it there without my knowledge. The sight of it almost brought tears to my eyes, for I had been thinking much of her lately, feeling intuitively that all was not well, and longing for tidings.

We have again been enveloped since the morning in such impenetrable fog that we cannot see six yards before us, and the dishevelled world seems once more to have surrendered itself hopelessly to chill mists, which give one an incipient feeling of rheumatism even to behold; and tumbling over tent-pegs has of course been once more the great diversion of the day. Should it not clear to-morrow, we shall have to hold on here, as it would be utter madness to ascend these precipitous heights in such weather. As we sit within our tents watching the mist scudding by, we only wish we could 'indent' on

the Rajah of Sikkim for a salvo of artillery, to bring down the rain and clear the sky.

The 'shikaree' has just brought in some game which he shot early this morning before the fog came on, and which we are to have cooked for dinner. Game in the Hills, if eaten soon after it is shot, is always tender ; but if kept till the following day, becomes hard, and then requires hanging for a much longer period, so that we generally 'kill and eat.' We brought this man with us ostensibly to shoot moonāls, the most magnificent bird it is possible to conceive, the size of a small turkey. Although to be found in numbers at this elevation, they fetch at Darjeeling the high price of 32 rupees (3*l.* 4*s.*), on account of their plumage, and we are sorely puzzled to know why he can find none of them, although he often bags the *hen* moonāl. He is always saying 'We shall meet with them to-morrow,' but the 'to-morrow' never comes ; and I cannot help stating here, although I may seem guilty of an anachronism, that not one does he bring down for us during the whole march, but that a few days after our return to Darjeeling, they are to be bought by the dozen. Of course the inference is plain, but I am happy to say that this man is not a Lepcha. Lepchas would be incapable of such treachery.

F—— is making an ornithological collection, and, with this exception, has obtained birds to be met with at every elevation. Surrounded by his bottles of arsenical solution and corrosive sublimate, like some alchemist,

he has been squatting before the fire all the day, busily occupied in preserving them ; and in various ways we all try to kill time till dinner is ready, which, whatever be the weather, rises and sets like the moon or stars, or some other equally unalterable law of nature. Happily the cook has been able to resume his duties, the fever, from which he was suffering, having yielded to large doses of quinine.

As rice is so scarce, our kind host gave a sheep to the camp before retiring for the night—a great treat in the estimation of the Lepchas and Bhootias, who will eat any kind of meat. Gathering together like eagles round a carcase, they did honour to the occasion by imbibing deep potations of ‘murwa,’ an intoxicating drink made from the fermented seed of millet, of which they partake very freely at their carousals. During the night watches some consequently grew very merry and musical, their minstrelsy, however, being none the more melodious from the fact of its being Bacchanalian, whilst others engaged in small feuds, which occasionally seemed to result in blows. At last, matters became so serious that F—— went out to try to quell the uproar ; but they were too far gone to heed remonstrance, and his efforts proving ineffectual in restoring tranquillity, sleep for us was of course out of the question.

Towards morning I was awakened by the most dismal wailing, close to the ‘kernaughts’ of our tent. At first I took no notice of it ; till the sighs and groans not only continuing, but growing more desperate

each moment, I felt sure it was some poor wretch in trouble come to seek redress from the *Sahib logue*. Hastily dressing, I went out, fully expecting to see Tatters or Pugla-wallah, as they call him, the poor half-witted man, whom so many seem to oppress. I was not a little surprised, therefore, when, instead of Pugla-wallah, I saw Fanchyng looking like a wounded fawn, and sitting in a most woebegone attitude on the frozen ground, dissolved in tears, and her clothes wet with dew, a very moist specimen of humanity altogether. There was quite sufficient light to enable me to see further that her white sleeves and jacket bore marks of violence, whilst her hair, usually so neatly plaited, hung in tangled masses over her face.

I guessed at once that there had been some misunderstanding between her husband and herself, which generally ends in bruises, if not in still more serious consequences; for these stalwart dwellers of the mountains—the Bhootias—think nothing of beating their wives severely on the smallest provocation. One would have thought that in this simple pastoral life there was no room for contention of any sort, but that, alas! is only a dream of Arcadia. Human nature is identical, wherever one finds it; and her woman's instinct had, I fancy, prompted her to come to me for sympathy, as, according to her notion, I was one of the 'ill-used sex.'

I tried hard to elicit the reason of her distress, but could at first get no satisfactory account of what had

happened, violent sobs being the only answer ; but after a long process of extraction, vigorously sustained on my part, amidst increased wailings and more copious tear-shedding on hers, I succeeded in making her confess at length, that Nimboo, availing himself of his authority as a husband, *had* administered a more than ordinarily severe dose of correction, which, from her downcast look and manner of telling, I could see had not been wholly unmerited. On my intimating this, she told me I was right, and from gesture, and a word or two helping me here and there, I *was* able in some way to connect her story.

It would seem that whilst sitting over their fire, devouring the sheep last night, elated no doubt by the effects of 'murwa,' Nautch-wallah, who was seated beside her, had not only picked out the tit-bits of the animal from his own platter, and put them into her mouth with his fingers—a mark of signal favour with all Orientals—but had subsequently, in true English fashion, and in imitation of F——, who, truth to tell, is occasionally guilty of a similar indiscretion with the chronicler of these pages, put his arm round her waist. These little attentions she did not repel as Nimboo expected she would have done. Hence the castigation, and hence these tears !

Ten o'clock A.M.—The Soubah, who has all along been the guest of Tendook, has just come to take leave, and no supplies of food having yet been sent into camp by the Kajee of Yangting, he has obtained for us two maunds (160 lbs.) of rice and twenty-two seers (52 lbs.) of

bhoota from Mongmoo, which we trust will keep the wolf from the door till help come ; but it is a mere nothing when one considers that each man consumes, or ought to consume, at least two pounds per diem. With it, however, the Soubah believes we may safely pursue our journey, added to the full expectation of the promised supplies overtaking us, in charge of the messenger whom C—— sent to the Kajee yesterday.

" We thank him for all his courtesy and kindness to us and our people, and then bid him farewell. The Soubah, expressing his deep regret that, being an *old* man, he is unable to accompany us himself, introduces the person whom we are to take with us as guide, assuring us he is thoroughly acquainted with the route, being a Nepaulese herdsman, who leads his kine along the Singaleelah Range into Sikkim for pasture regularly every year during the summer months.

Notwithstanding his humble calling, he wears a scarlet tunic embroidered with gold and black, and is unquestionably a fine, manly, and intelligent-looking fellow. But I note that he has a treacherous eye, in spite of his frank and manly bearing ; and confess to having taken an intuitive and instantaneous dislike to him.



CHAPTER XXXIII.

‘MRS. SYNTAX IN SEARCH OF THE PICTURESQUE.’

WE have been detained at Mount Singaleelah three days, not only waiting for food, but hoping for a change of weather, which has been no less foggy and impracticable here than when we were encamped on Mount Tongloo. But to-day being a great improvement upon yesterday, although there is still a little mist hanging about the higher ridges, we intend to make a brilliant effort, and start as soon as tents can be struck.

More rice and bhoota have also reached camp during the night, sent by our kind old friend the Soubah, the quantity being sufficient to last several days. Despatching another messenger to that tiresome and incorrigible Kajee, to inform him that we shall be marching along the Singaleelah Range, and urging him to send supplies after us without delay, we have every hope—as we make short marches—that they will overtake us before the present stock is exhausted.

The first messenger whom C—— despatched, however, returned this morning, with the assurance from the Kajee himself—who appears to know our plans better than we do ourselves—that we *must* pass through the Rajah of

Sikkim's territory, and that we should find the necessary stores awaiting our arrival at Yangting. But this, F—— and I cannot help fearing, is a mere excuse, the Kajee having been told positively to send them *here*. Less sanguine than our host, we begin to suspect some little treachery; but he assures us that were the Kajee to play us false, or show us any incivility, it might cost him too dear, and that he has too lively a recollection of the retributive justice of the British Government to venture upon it. We can only hope, therefore, that he may be brought to reason by this second messenger; but it is anything but consoling to remember that in 1849 this same man, then Soubah of Singtam, despitefully illtreated Drs. Hooker and Campbell, made prisoners of them and their people, kept them confined in a close cell, and nearly starved them. Nor was it till the warlike attitude of our Government alarmed the Rajah, and troops were sent to procure their release, that the Kajee ceased hostilities, and gave freedom to the captives. The Rajah—an amiable man himself— is but a tool in the hands of his ministers, who do pretty much as they like, not only with him but with his dominions also. He was not allowed to go unpunished, however, being made responsible for the conduct of his subordinates. The loss of part of his territory was the consequence, while the annual compensation of 300*l.* per annum granted him on his cession of Darjeeling, mentioned in an earlier chapter, was henceforth withdrawn.

Whilst busy in our several ways preparing for the

march, Nimboo comes to ask permission to join the party who are gone on to Pemionchi, urging the impossibility of his wife's undertaking such a journey as that which we had arranged for ourselves. But this proposition is at once indignantly rejected. He is one of the strongest and most trusty of my dandy-bearers, and F—— tells him at once that he cannot be spared, adding that as he did not ask leave to bring Fanchyng, he must take the consequences, at the same time magnanimously suggesting that *she* should be sent under escort of two chuprasees to Pemionchi. On seeing Nimboo hesitate at this proposal, F—— hints that the objectionable Nautch-wallah will be left behind with *us*; but even this fails to satisfy him. In common with his race, he possesses, I fancy, a general and undefinable jealousy, for on hearing from one of the men standing by that he would not leave her behind at Darjeeling, C—— enquired of whom he was jealous. 'Eh!' he exclaimed, shrugging his shoulders significantly, 'who can tell?'

We are all the more resolved upon being firm, believing fully that he is only making his wife's incapacity an excuse for obtaining a little holiday and spree at our expense amongst his own people, some of whom, Fanchyng previously informed me, lived within two days' march of Pemionchi. We also know full well that these Hill women are often as strong as men, frequently carrying loads weighing 6 maunds (520 lbs.), and that where Nimboo can go, she can go also.

There has been much discussion as to the manner in which I am to be carried up the mountain—an almost perpendicular precipice of 600 feet,—which must be scaled before the crest of this range can again be reached, and the gradient of which is far too steep for a dandy. I can see the gestures of Catoo as he asserts the impossibility of my being carried at all, whilst Tendook—who is always called in to decide these knotty points—seems equally enthusiastic as to the impossibility of my ascending it on hands and knees. I can understand nothing that they say, for they are talking Lepcha, but watch their movements eagerly, feeling intuitively that, in some way or other, I am the subject of them. Presently I see Tendook hurrying off as fast as his fat legs will carry him, his pigtail flying out at least a yard behind, trying to overtake the coolie laden with the camp chairs, who is just beginning the ascent. Balancing myself upon a tent-peg, I make a little sketch of him on the spot, and soon see him returning with the coolie.



The meaning of this I at once divine. In some extraordinary manner—a profound mystery yet—I am to be carried in a chair. Two coolies are next seen hurrying off with their 'bans,' to cut bamboo canes, and in half an hour's time a little shelf is constructed, and firmly

fastened to the lowest part to rest the feet upon. Watching these impending mysteries with the keenest interest, I see the chair finally strapped to a 'kursing,'—a bamboo frame which these mountaineers invariably use for carrying their loads, whatever these may be, furnished with a circular strap of plaited cane on either side, through which the arms are placed, whilst a third strap passes over the forehead; so that, although the load is carried on the back, it will be seen that the greatest weight is sustained by the head.

I next observe the muscular form of Hatti coming to the fore, and in an instant comprehend that I am to



be carried on this giant's back. It must not be supposed, however, that F—— and C—— are not here to give their sanction to these proceedings. On the contrary, C—— mischievously threatens to make a sketch of me as soon as I am fairly impaled, and call it 'Mrs. Syntax in Search of the Pictu- resque.' At length Ten-

dook announces that all is ready; I take my seat with as grave a countenance as I can assume, am strongly

fastened to the chair like a bundle of merchandise, a strap being made to encircle the waist; Hatti then seats himself on the ground *dos-à-dos*, puts his arms through the kursing-straps, rises with Tendook's and Catoo's assistance, for the first pull is the worst, and we are under weigh. As I am borne aloft, C—— and F——, taking off their hats, shout, 'En r-r-r-route!' and with the whole staff of dandy-wallahs arranged before and behind me in case of accident, we proceed in solemn procession, and I soon feel, by the very uncomfortable motion, that we have begun the ascent.

Then upwards we crawl by jutting rock, through briar and bramble; Hatti, in spite of his great strength, groaning and snorting like a hippopotamus. I had just bidden him stop for an instant's rest, when our progress was forcibly checked by one of the tent-laden coolies in advance, who was loudly calling for help, his load having got jammed between two pieces of rock. As soon as he was extricated, by the united efforts of three men, we resume our climb, and reach the summit in safety.

Once let loose, I shake myself like some wild animal, feeling very thankful again to be on *terra firma*. How appalling it is to look down the deadly precipice whence we had come, and watch the remainder of the coolies toiling up the ascent, sometimes on all fours, at others catching hold of the tough branches of rhododendron. Then the gentlemen come scrambling up like Alpine chamois, only far less nimbly, and obliged frequently to

avail themselves of the help of those of our people who happen to be within their reach.

On looking upwards from our encampment below, we imagined that this summit once gained, we should find ourselves at the highest point; but so deceptive are mountains, as all know who have travelled amongst them, that we still see ridge upon ridge towering above us,



stately and shattered undulations of gneiss, whilst everywhere around us lie masses of bold and barren rock. To the west are the nearer mountains of Nepaul; but looking north, the eye wanders over the mighty billows of the Singaleelah Range, bristling with pines.

Having given ourselves and our people rest, and ascertained that none are left behind, we journey on again, hoping to reach our next camping-place, the summit of a lofty mountain, before nightfall. It is impossible to describe the steepness of the climb during a great portion of the day's march, my dandy often being in an almost perpendicular position. Full many a time it gets fixed between fragments of fallen rock, as my bearers carry me

along, the stalwart Bhootias assisting me to alight with a gentleness as if they thought I must break, or in some way or other fall to pieces.

We have now left rhododendrons behind, and a little aromatic species takes their place, growing about twelve inches from the ground, its brown and dry leaves emitting a delicious perfume as we tread them under foot. The scarlet barberry, too, is seen everywhere, and sadly impedes our progress, rendering our climb more laborious than it would otherwise have been, whilst its tiny thorns prove a very weariness to the flesh. Nor is it easy at all times to follow the pathway, for white vapour keeps sweeping over us, not dense enough, however, to exclude the rugged outline of the rocks, which in all their weird beauty may sometimes be dimly seen, but it makes the smooth, lichen-covered stones slippery; and a short distance before me I presently saw a pair of mocassins against a background of grey mist, which threw them out in strong relief, and heard the cries of some one calling lustily for help. Instantly running to the rescue, my bearers found one of the baggage coolies holding on, head downwards, by the roots of a barberry bush, which had become exposed by the washing away of the soil: the poor fellow, having wandered slightly from the track, had fallen, whilst a precipice yawning beneath him, he was unable to change his terrible position unaided.

The character of the scenery now changes rapidly, and in an hour's time, all appearance of mist departing,